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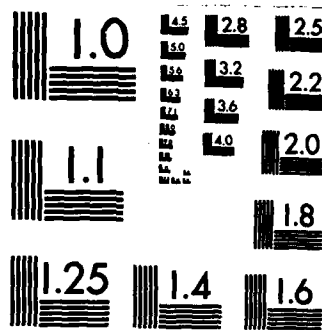
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Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War: A Reappraisal

James A. Treadwell, Captain  
HQDA, MILPERCEN (DAPC - OPA - E)  
200 Stovall Street  
Alexandria, VA 22332

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Final Report 2 May 1985

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A thesis submitted to Rice University, Houston, Texas, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War: A Reappraisal		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Final Report 2 May 1985
7. AUTHOR(s) James A. Treadwell		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS HQDA, MILPERCEN ATTN: DAPC-CRA-E 200 Stovall Street, Alexandria VA 22332		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		12. REPORT DATE 2 May 1985
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 102
		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Thesis submitted to Rice University, Houston TX 77001		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Jefferson Davis; War Department, 1853-1857; sectional politics; 1855 Rifle Marked; United States Military Academy; Improvements to U.S. Army; Crimean Commission; 1857 Army Regulations; Light Infantry Tactics, 1855.		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) See reverse		

## BLOCK 20

→Jefferson Davis's biographers have credited him with responsibility for most of the changes to the army during his administration of the War Department: experiments with camels on the western frontier, increases to the pay and strength of the army, improvements to the United States Military Academy, development of new rifled weapons and infantry tactics to complement them, revision of army regulations, and a commission to observe the Crimean War. His biographers also claim that while he may have allowed sectional politics to enter into his efforts to secure selection of a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, his other actions were totally without regard to sectional considerations. Currently available evidence indicates that Davis was not nearly so important as his biographers have claimed, and that his southern sympathies were a major, if not determining, factor in many of his decisions.

RICE UNIVERSITY

JEFFERSON DAVIS AS SECRETARY OF WAR:  
A REAPPRAISAL

by

JAMES ALAN TREADWELL

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

*Ira D. Gruber*

Ira D. Gruber, Professor  
of History, Chairman

*John B. Boles*

John B. Boles, Professor  
of History

*John F. Guilmartin*

John F. Guilmartin, Adjunct  
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## Abstract

### JEFFERSON DAVIS AS SECRETARY OF WAR: A REAPPRAISAL

James Alan Treadwell

Jefferson Davis's biographers have credited him with responsibility for most of the changes to the army during his administration of the War Department: experiments with camels on the western frontier, increases to the pay and strength of the army, improvements to the United States Military Academy, development of new rifled weapons and infantry tactics to complement them, revision of army regulations, and a commission to observe the Crimean War. His biographers also claim that while he may have allowed sectional politics to enter into his efforts to secure selection of a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, his other actions were totally without regard to sectional considerations. Currently available evidence indicates that Davis was not nearly so important as his biographers have claimed, and that his southern sympathies were a major, if not determining, factor in many of his decisions.



corps, but in so doing, he merely supported what others had long advocated.

If then Davis's biographers were too generous in their praise of his efforts to increase the size of the army and the benefits for widows, orphans, and officers, were they any more accurate in describing his role in reorganizing the War Department and improving the United States Military Academy? Dodd argued that Davis was primarily responsible for persuading Congress to reorganize the War Department and improve West Point. Although Weigley believed that Davis had failed in his efforts to change the administration of the War Department, Winston essentially agree with Dodd's conclusion that Davis had been instrumental in improvements to the academy. But what do the Davis Papers say?

Davis devoted over a third of his 1854 annual report to a discussion of the urgent need for a reorganization of the War Department. He discussed at length the problems in the present system: the "many unseemly controversies" resulting from the proliferation of brevet ranks and the confusion  
er who had the right to command, the difficulties of

### Acknowledgements

The past two years have been especially enjoyable to me, largely because of the people with which I have had the opportunity to work. The open, questioning attitude of my fellow graduate students and the support and interest of the Rice History Department faculty have given me a new perspective on the study of history.

In particular I would like to acknowledge my debt to Professor Ira Gruber -- his encouragement and criticism throughout my work at Rice, and especially on this thesis, have been invaluable. In addition, Lynda Crist and Mary Dix have guided me through the Davis Papers and brought specific documents to my attention that I might otherwise have missed; their willing assistance and cheerful attitudes will be the standard against which I will judge all archivists. To these and all the others who have helped me, I am deeply grateful.

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## Chapter 1

### A Collective Assessment

On 7 December 1852 President-elect Franklin Pierce wrote Jefferson Davis, a prominent Mississippi planter and politician, asking him to come to Washington, D. C., "to converse with you of the South and particularly of the formation of my Cabinet."<sup>1</sup> Although Pierce was not explicitly offering Davis a cabinet position, in retrospect it appears clear that that was his intention. Indeed, Davis's journey to Washington would mark the beginning of what many historians feel was his period of greatest contribution to the nation -- a period in which he would strive as secretary of war to build a strong army for the United States.

Before being called to Washington Davis spent many of his forty-four years in the service of the United States of America. Appointed to the United States Military Academy in

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1. Jefferson Davis, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Haskell M. Monroe, James T. McIntosh, and Lynda L. Crist, ed., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971-1985), IV, 307-308.

1824, Davis graduated in the class of 1828 and accepted assignment to the First Infantry Regiment as a brevet second lieutenant. For the next seven years, he served in the small regular army of the United States. A succession of assignments at typical frontier army posts -- isolated, crude, and expensive -- acquainted him with the rigors of army life and undoubtedly influenced his later actions on behalf of the army's officers and men.

Davis resigned from the army in 1835 and settled with his oldest brother, Joseph Davis, at Davis Bend, Mississippi. Until 1843 Jefferson Davis remained in relative seclusion at Davis Bend, devoting his time to the establishment of a cotton plantation on land given to him by his brother.

Davis reentered public service in 1843, serving as a presidential elector for James K. Polk. In 1845 Davis won election to the United States House of Representatives and served until 1846 when he resigned to accept the command of the First Mississippi Regiment of Volunteer Riflemen. His exploits in the Mexican War at the battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista assured the continuation of his political career.

Albert G. Brown, governor of Mississippi, appointed Davis to fill the United States Senate seat left vacant by the death of Jesse Speight in 1847. Reelected in the regular elections of 1848, Davis served in the Senate until 1851 when he resigned to run for governor of Mississippi on the

State Rights platform against Henry S. Foote. Although losing the election, Davis remained a rising political star.

From Pierce's perspective, Davis was then eminently qualified for the position of secretary of war. Davis's early military career in the regular army and his more recent service in the Mexican War promised to give the country an unusually well informed secretary. Moreover, he had been a member of Congress and a personal friend of Pierce. Indeed, Davis would serve as secretary of war throughout Pierce's term of office and return to Congress as a Mississippi senator until the Civil War.

Although his biographers agree that as secretary of war Davis would render his greatest service to the United States, they give little attention to that period of his life. They do attribute the various innovations in weapons and tactics and improvements in the army to his personal influence; and they do celebrate his administrative capability and intrinsic nationalism.

Most of Davis's biographers have, however, relied on his own annual reports as primary source of information for his accomplishments as secretary of war. In so doing they have fostered a number of misperceptions about his actions as secretary of war.

Consider a representative sample of what his biographers have said about Davis. William Dodd's Jefferson Davis was

them -- that Davis was primarily responsible for experimentation with camels on the western frontier. Davis discussed using camels as pack animals in each of his four annual reports. In 1853 he strongly recommended an appropriation to purchase camels for tests in the American west.<sup>2</sup> Davis again recommended the purchase of camels in 1854, this time emphasizing the potential savings in annual transportation costs.<sup>3</sup> Funds were included in the army appropriation bill of 1854, and in his 1855 annual report Davis briefly summarized the actions taken to procure the necessary animals.<sup>4</sup> Davis's final report in 1856 mentioned the number of camels imported and the positive results<sup>5</sup> achieved by the camels in their initial tests.

Davis had attempted even before he became secretary of war to secure a test of camels in America. In 1851 Davis introduced an amendment to the army appropriation bill allocating \$30,000 for the "purchase and introduction" of camels with the equipment and native handlers necessary to determine their effectiveness. Davis's esteemed colleagues<sup>6</sup> in the Senate laughed at his amendment. The Senate

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2. Rowland, II, 319-321.
3. Rowland, II, 396.
4. Rowland, II, 560-561.
5. Rowland, III, 93-95.
6. Davis, Papers, IV, 167-170.

immigration and thereby encourage further development of the western frontier. Clearly it was a favorable time for the adoption of measures designed to improve and modernize the nation's military forces.

Why then did Davis's biographers assume that he played such a significant role? He must, of course, be given a certain degree of credit for all the accomplishments of the department during the period he exercised supervisory control. Simply by virtue of his occupation of the office of secretary he would, of necessity, have played some role in the developments during his tenure. Liable for blame in the event of failure, he may justly share the credit for success. However, is it plausible to give him as much credit as his biographers have given him or to judge the extent of his involvement by his own reports?

In order to determine Davis's role in the innovations during this period, the answers to a number of questions must be found. First, what did Davis recommend and when was his recommendation made? Was the recommendation supported by the commanding general or the military staff? If so, was Davis merely accepting the ideas of his subordinates? If not, was he pressing for change against their will, was he advocating ideas of his own? Answers to these questions should clarify Davis's role as secretary of war.

On one issue there is no debate. Dodd, Strode, Winston, and Weigley agree -- and a review of the evidence supports



function as a congressional lobbyist for the War Department. Moreover, Davis served as secretary at a time when there was tremendous opportunity for change in the military establishment of the United States. Entering the department after the divisive political struggle over the Compromise of 1850, but before the equally divisive conflicts over Kansas and Nebraska, Davis began his tenure as secretary during a respite in the sectional conflict over slavery. This respite allowed the army to benefit from many technological advances from a "technological revolution" in the military art. This revolution came about as a result of scientific research and development conducted by officers who were first scientists and then soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Although the highest levels of the army were still occupied by veterans of the War of 1812, younger and better educated officers were widespread throughout the staff and the technical services.

Simultaneously with this modernization of the army's officer corps, the composition of Congress was changing. The northeastern and southeastern seaboard were no longer dominant in political circles, the West grew increasingly powerful and its interests were best served by a stronger military force that could protect the tide of western

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1. Stanley L. Falk, "Soldier-Technologist: Major Alfred Mordecai and the Beginnings of Science in the United States Army," a two volume unpublished doctoral dissertation at Georgetown University in 1959.

## Chapter 2

### Congressional Lobbyist

Consider first Davis's role as secretary of war in those issues that required congressional approval. According to his biographers, to Weigley, and to Davis himself, he achieved a great deal working through Congress. He directed experiments with camels on the frontier, increased the strength and pay of the army, and supported benefits for widows and orphans and retired officers. He attempted to develop a stronger, more efficient War Department that could better serve national interests. He persuaded Congress to construct new facilities at the United States Military Academy. Despite his strong southern sympathies, Davis largely ignored sectional considerations in directing surveys for a transcontinental railroad and in improving coastal fortifications and American waterways. But did Davis do all that has been attributed to him?

Davis was intimately aware of the problems associated with securing congressional support for the army. He served on and chaired the Senate Committee on Military Affairs -- an experience which should have increased his ability to

there indications that his political sentiments influenced his decisions in selecting a route for the transcontinental railroad, in constructing a national system of coastal fortifications, and in improving navigation in harbors and on rivers? How did Davis use his executive authority -- was he productive and impartial? Would another secretary of war have delayed the approval of the Model 1855 Rifle Musket or were its advantages so widely recognized that his indorsement was just a formality? If he recognized the advantages of the rifle musket, what kept him from perceiving the even greater potential of the breechloader? What part did he play in the evolution of Hardee's Tactics? Did he actually realize the effect rifled weapons would have on tactics? Did Davis revise the army's regulations or did he merely approve the work of an anonymous staff officer? If he was personally involved in the revision, how can his influence be seen? Why did he send a commission to observe the Crimean War?

Answers to these and other questions, all centering on Davis's role as secretary of war, can be found through a close examination of the operations of that department from 7 March 1853 to 6 March 1857, a critical period for both the Department of War and Jefferson Davis.

understanding of his actual involvement in the "activity of the Department during that period."

Moreover, all efforts at evaluating Davis's role as secretary of war have depended on incomplete or biased sources. Due to the diligent efforts of the Jefferson Davis Association over the past twenty-two years, a far more complete collection of Davis documents now exists. Although some of Davis's actions still cannot be understood, historians are able to benefit from the greatly improved primary source materials for Davis's life.

These materials allow a reappraisal of Davis's career. They substantiate many previous conclusions about Davis; however, they also illuminate new aspects of his character. My objective is to gain a better understanding of Davis's role as secretary of war through the use of all available documentary evidence, particularly to employ newly gathered evidence in analyzing his annual reports.

Were Davis's biographers correct in concluding that he was a creative, innovative secretary of war? Was he successful in persuading Congress to conduct experiments with camels, to increase the pay and strength of the army, and to improve the United States Military Academy? Would another secretary have been any more successful in obtaining benefits for widows, orphans, and retired officers? And regarding the often repeated claim that Davis steadfastly refused to allow sectional issues to enter into his cabinet actions, are

the War Department. An aspiring contemporary biographer, interested in his background, military career, and political stand on issues of the day, once asked him:

While Secretary of War, what acts of public interest may justly be attributed to you?

Davis replied:

Revision of Army Regulations\_ Introducing of light Infantry or rifle system\_ of Tactics\_ Manufacture of rifle musket & pistols and use of the Minnie ball. System of Geographical explorations and conduct of explorations across the continent under a law of Congress to explore for the most practicable and economical route for a railroad. Seacoast and frontier defences, including campaigns for the pacification of hostile Indians, and the increase of the Army by the addition of four regiments, attest the zeal and activity of the Department during that period.[13]

Davis's answer highlights the importance he attached to issues frequently mentioned by his biographers but fails to address his responsibility for those actions.

Even allowing for the emphasis Davis's biographers naturally put on his personal influence and the corresponding emphasis that army historians have put on institutional elements, there is a substantial disparity between these two assessments of his actions. Davis's personal assessment of the period adds little to our

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13. Letter from Jefferson Davis to Robert Carter dated 9 February 1859. L. S. Ruder Collection at Beauvoir, Biloxi, Mississippi.

Weigley's History of the United States Army, a volume in the highly acclaimed The MacMillan Wars of the United States series, was originally published at about the same time as Ganoe's work, but Weigley's book is considerably better known. Weigley does mention Davis as secretary of war and devotes about three pages to his actions in that position. He describes Davis as, "A reforming Secretary on the model of Calhoun," and states that he was "one of those Americans almost obsessed with the vision of a transcontinental railroad to the Pacific shore . . . ." Weigley credits Davis with sponsoring the adoption of a rifled infantry musket, and gives him primary responsibility for the introduction of camels for service in the West, a commission to observe the Crimean War, and a pay increase for the officers and men of the army. Weigley comments on Davis's unsuccessful efforts to decrease the rate of desertion from the army, to modify the system of officer promotion, and to establish an armory on the Pacific coast. Weigley also states that Davis's efforts to reorganize the command structure of the army in order to resolve the ambiguities of the interrelated roles of president, secretary of war, and commanding general were unsuccessful.<sup>12</sup>

We also have Davis's personal assessment of his years in

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12. Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1967), pp. 190-192.

his tenure.

Of course these authors were writing biographies about Davis, not about the members of the army staff, the technologists in the national armories, or the chairmen of the congressional committees on military affairs, all of whom clearly played important roles in the adoption of these changes. It is natural for a biographer to emphasize the role of his subject; therefore, to balance the judgements of biographers, it may be useful to see how historians of the army view Davis. Two of the more respected works on the army are William Ganoe's The History of the United States Army and Russell Weigley's History of the United States Army. Their commentaries on this period of the army's history, and on Davis's role in it, are somewhat different than those of Davis's biographers.

Ganoe's book devotes a little over five pages to the period when Davis was secretary, giving Davis no credit for being innovative. The conversion of flintlock muskets to the percussion system of priming is discussed as is the development of the Model 1855 Rifle Musket using the "hollow base conical bullet"; however, no mention of Davis's role in either of these is found. Indeed, Congress received credit<sup>11</sup> for the increases to the pay and in the size of the army.

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11. William A. Ganoe, The History of the United States Army, (Ashton, Maryland: Eric Lundberg, 1964), pp. 234-240.

during this period, Winston also clearly feels that Davis was instrumental in, if not personally responsible for, a markedly superior military organization.

Through the eyes of Dodd, Strode, and Winston it is possible to summarize the current biographical view of Jefferson Davis's actions as secretary of war. It is a picture of Davis as a dynamic, innovative, and progressive secretary. Concerned over the conditions of army life, he spared no effort to improve the lot of both officer and common soldier. He was farseeing in his understanding of the capabilities of improved weapons and the impact those weapons would have on tactics. Although his speeches in the Senate during the debates over the Compromise of 1850 must have made him suspect in the minds of at least a few congressmen, his actions as secretary of war showed little sectional bias.<sup>10</sup> In fact, biographers portray Davis as almost apolitical during his tenure -- his few brief political actions resulting in his greatest failures. And most important, all three biographers present their material in such a manner as to imply that Jefferson Davis was personally responsible for either the conception or the recommendation of all the innovations which occurred during

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10. This assertion specifically relates to Davis's efforts on behalf of the army. In regards to the Pacific railroad surveys, which will be discussed later, that claim could not be made.



And more important, Davis's efforts were, in Winston's as in Dodd's view, totally without regard to the interests of the South.

"Indeed it would have been easy for Secretary Davis to have favored the South at the expense of the North. . . . But he did not do this; no charge of favoritism has been made." [8]

Winston also highlighted a personality trait that many Civil War analysts see as part of the cause of the southern defeat: Davis's desire to become intimately involved in the myriad of daily details surrounding any position of authority.

As Secretary of War, the Colonel was in the right place. Reveling in details, he inspected every account, supervised each order, and left nothing to his subordinates. Not the smallest button on a soldier's coat was unaccounted for -- a trait of character desirable and undesirable, the detail-mind functioning admirably in a narrow field but failing to grasp and coordinate larger and more complex situations. [9]

Davis's inability to delegate authority over relatively unimportant matters in order to focus his attention on critical issues is still considered one of his most serious shortcomings as president of the confederacy.

Though more circumspect than Strode in his wording concerning Davis's role in the many improvements to the army

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8. Winston, p. 116.

9. Winston, p. 113.

for economy, uniformity and efficiency rather than in the hands of corporations represented by lobbyists. He therefore urged the establishment of a new national armory on the West Coast. Advocating a thorough exploration of western frontiers, he set in motion meteorological and geological surveys. He was vigorous in directing pending projects of harbor and river improvements.[6]

As the eye-catching title of Robert Winston's biography implies, High Stakes and Hair Trigger, The Life of Jefferson Davis, is a somewhat more dramatic account of the events of Davis's life. Like Dodd, whom he cited as a source, and Strode, Winston gives Davis high marks for his efforts to improve United States Military Academy, to increase the size of and compensation for the army, to conduct experiments with camels for use on the frontier, and to improve and strengthen the system of national fortifications.

To a much greater degree than Dodd, Winston emphasizes the paradox of Davis as the architect of an improved and more capable army, which Davis would subsequently see used against his southern homeland.

"Under the efficient War Secretary, indeed, the army became a new and coherent organization. Paradoxically enough the country was being moulded into a nation."[7]

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6. Hudson Strode, Jefferson Davis: American Patriot, 1808-1861, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), I, 260-261.

7. Robert W. Winston, High Stakes and Hair Trigger, The Life of Jefferson Davis, (Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1930), p. 115.

praised Davis for building a system of national fortifications, "without favoritism to his own section,"<sup>5</sup> All of Dodd's claims for Davis as secretary of war, except for the use of rifles by the First Mississippi Regiment during the Mexican War can be traced to Davis's annual reports.

The most recent of the Davis biographies is Hudson Strode's Jefferson Davis: American Patriot, 1808-1861 which was published in 1955. A three-volume work clearly intended to be definitive, it was unfortunately written before many of the currently available Davis documents came to light. Like Dodd, Strode is very specific in enumerating a long list of Davis accomplishments as secretary of war.

In the operations of his department, Davis infused an energy hitherto unknown. He advocated a system to improve the discipline and efficiency of officers, and raised their salaries to something more nearly commensurate with amounts men of their caliber would be receiving in civil positions. He recommended improvements in the recruiting service and other reforms calculated to curtail desertions, which had risen to 16 percent since the war with Mexico. He got the pay of privates increased and their living conditions bettered. Fascinated by the theory of warfare, though ever deploring its practice, Davis renovated and rejuvenated the whole army. He strengthened the medical corps. He introduced the light infantry system of tactics, rifled muskets, and the Minie-ball. He advised Congress that the manufacture of arms for the United States Army should be under the control of the War Department

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5. Dodd, pp. 151, 133-134. Dodd acknowledged the possibility of sectional favoritism on the part of Davis only in the Pacific railroad surveys.

originally published in 1907, but it is still one of the<sup>2</sup> most widely cited sources of information on Davis's life, even though it was completed well before the publication of the first collection of Jefferson Davis documents by Dunbar Rowland.<sup>3</sup> As the following passage indicates, Dodd thought Davis a strong secretary of war:

Davis was not slow to show forth his fitness; he revised the regulations of the service, introduced new tactics, and caused the infantry to be provided with rifles constructed on the latest models, such as, for example, his regiment had used with telling effect in the campaigns of Monterrey and Buena Vista. The "Minie" ball, so familiar to every soldier of a later day, was an innovation of his as was likewise the medical corps. He experimented with the camel, in the hope of bringing our distant western posts closer together; and he dreamed of changing the methods of promotion so that merit, and not age, should determine rank in the service. But in this he failed.[4]

Dodd also gives Davis credit for all the recommendations he made to Congress for improving the United States Military Academy and the system of permanent fortifications and for increasing the strength and pay of the army. Indeed he

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2. See, for example, the bibliographic essays of John McCardell, The Idea of a Southern Nation, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 375, and Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism 1848-1861, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), p. 412.

3. Dunbar Rowland, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, (Jackson, Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Archives, 1923).

4. William E. Dodd, Jefferson Davis, (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Company, 1907), p. 133.

rejected Davis's amendment 19 to 24 on that occasion, but his faith in what was considered a ludicrous idea by at least some of his fellow senators was eventually vindicated.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the most often mentioned improvements in the army during Davis's tenure -- improvements attributed to him by Dodd, Strode, and Winston -- were an increase in the authorized end strength of the army and an increase in the compensation of soldiers. As can be seen in Davis's first annual report, these were inter-related issues. The problem was two-fold in nature; first, military pay was too low to allow the army to fill its authorized units. To make matters worse, even if the army were manned at its authorized level, it would still be too small to accomplish its assigned missions.

As Davis noted in his 1853 report the authorized strength of the army was 13,821 officers and men, but the actual strength was only 8,378.<sup>8</sup> Davis's solution to this disparity was to recommend a package of recruiting and reenlistment

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7. A recent and fairly comprehensive account of the army's experimentation with camels is Odie B. Faulk's The United States Camel Corps: An Army Experiment, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

8. Rowland, II, 292. I have cited Rowland in all references to Davis's remarks in the secretary of war annual reports to assist the reader desiring to examine the context of Davis's remarks in greater detail. References to the accompanying documents are as found in congressional records.

incentives which would allow the army to compete with civilian employers for unskilled labor. Davis devoted about fourteen percent of the 1853 report to the urgent need for increases in the soldier's pay to improve enlistments, and reenlistments. In addition, he recommended that qualified noncommissioned officers have the opportunity to become<sup>9</sup> commissioned officers.

The impetus for Davis's initiative can be found in the high desertion rate that had plagued the army since the end of the Mexican War. Noticing the correlation between the number of desertions and the prosperity of the country, Davis decided that by raising the soldier's pay and providing for automatic pay increases, the desertion problem would be substantially solved. These two measures and the provision for appointment of qualified noncommissioned officers to the commissioned officer corps would give "the hope of advancement" which was the "foundation of<sup>10</sup> professional zeal and success," to the entire army.

Davis included in his report a recommendation that certificates be awarded to noncommissioned officers who had distinguished themselves in the Mexican War. Although discussed in a separate part of the report, this

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9. Rowland, II, 299-302.

10. Rowland, II, 302. Perhaps Davis was providing an insight into the reason that he had resigned from the army in 1835.

recommendation was clearly developed from the same line of thought as Davis's other measures to encourage reenlistments by rewarding superior performance. He also felt that soldiers required to perform additional fatigue duties were<sup>11</sup> entitled to increased compensation.

Davis's recruiting and reenlistment incentives were subsequently endorsed by Congress in a legislative act entitled, "An Act to increase the Pay of the rank and File of [the] Army, and to encourage enlistments." This act was passed during the next session of Congress on 4 August 1854<sup>12</sup> and adopted Davis's recommendations in full.

Unfortunately, even if the recruiting and reenlistment measures had been successful, the authorized strength would not have been sufficient. Davis felt that the minimum increase to the army which would allow it to meet its commitments was one regiment of dragoons and two regiments of riflemen, with a minimum of sixty-four privates in all companies. He also recommended that an additional company of engineer sappers be added to the army and that provision<sup>13</sup> be made for enlisting hospital stewards.

Davis's recommendations for increasing the size of the

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11. Rowland, II, 306.

12. United States Statutes at Large, Richard Peters, ed., (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845-1855), 33:1, 575.

13. Rowland, II, 305.

army took up about seven percent of his 1853 report. In this report he based his request on the relatively small increases in the peace-time establishment of the army in comparison with the tremendous increases in the size and population of the country. Congress failed to act on that recommendation during the next session, and in 1854 he renewed his appeal for a strength increase, this time allocating eleven percent of the report to this issue.

But in his 1854 report Davis used a different approach, focusing on the wide dispersal of forces and arguing that the cost of increasing the army would be substantially less than the cost of suppressing Indian hostilities after they flared into open warfare.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Davis combined his recommendation for a strength increase with recommendations for a reorganization of the army and for increased pay and retirement for officers. This attempt simultaneously to introduce a number of innovations proved unsuccessful. However, on 3 March 1855 an appropriation for an addition of two regiments of infantry and two regiments of cavalry was included in the army appropriations act by James Shields,<sup>15</sup> the chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs. No mention was made of the need for additional engineer sappers in later reports, but the need for an increased

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14. Rowland, II, 303-305, 392-395.

15. Statutes at Large, 33:2, 639; Davis, Papers, V, 98-99.



medical corps was raised again in 1855.<sup>16</sup>

It might seem obvious that the strength of the army and the level of compensation of their soldiers would have been a concern of all the army's leaders -- not just the secretary of war. Military leaders always seem to feel that they need larger forces and that the pay of their soldiers is too low. And yet, in the last annual report of Davis's predecessor, Charles M. Conrad, there is no mention of the need for a pay increase for the army. In fact, in 1850 Davis himself had urged Conrad to include a pay increase in the departmental recommendations to Congress on the upcoming appropriation act.<sup>17</sup>

Conrad did recommend increases in the engineer and medical corps, and the commanding general of the army, Winfield Scott, recommended an increase in the strength of the army; but neither raised the issue of the need for increasing the pay of the army.<sup>18</sup> That Conrad did not mention a pay increase in the 1852 report would seem to indicate that Davis's recruiting and reenlistment package was not inherited from his predecessors. The recommendation for a strength increase, however, was an issue that previous

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16. Rowland, II, 558.

17. Davis, Papers, IV, 387.

18. Senate Executive Document #1, 32:2, continuation, 3-11, 33-37.

secretaries had supported.

Another indication that Davis's recommendations on military compensation were his own can be seen in the difference between his and Winfield Scott's attitudes toward desertion. Desertion was not a new problem, as Davis indicated by using figures of the desertion rate since 1826; however, his particular recommendations seem to have reflected his own ideas on how to correct the problem. Scott had alluded to the problem in a letter that accompanied Davis's annual report for 1853, but rather than recommend a pay increase, Scott had proposed the establishment of service and depot companies for all regiments. Service companies would be responsible for all operational missions, and depot companies would be garrisoned at the regimental headquarters and serve as cadre to take charge of recruits at the recruiting depots, transport them to the frontier, and train them until they were proficient in basic military skills. All companies of each regiment would serve in rotation as depot company.<sup>19</sup> There is a striking difference between the two proposals; Davis would gain the willing service of the soldier by providing incentives to enlisting and then reenlisting, while Scott would reduce the opportunities for recruits to

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19. Senate Executive Document #1, 33:1, volume II, part 2, 96-97.

desert.

Nor was the 1853 report Davis's first effort to support a strength increase. Since the reduction of the army after the supposed termination of Indian hostilities in Florida in 1842, Congress had authorized two strength increases. Those increases were a regiment of mounted riflemen in 1846 and authorization to increase the strength of all companies posted on the frontier from sixty-four to seventy-four<sup>20</sup> privates. Davis had supported both of these congressional actions.

In the House debate on the 1846 increase, Davis expressed his feelings on how the army should be increased. Davis felt there were two ways to increase the army -- raising additional regiments or increasing the strength of existing regiments. Davis favored the addition of new regiments. The addition of new regiments would provide the nucleus of experienced leaders and soldiers to which additional recruits could be added in emergencies. In this manner increased numbers could be gained without sacrificing experience. Davis saw the need not only for additional regiments but especially for a regiment of mounted riflemen<sup>21</sup> which would have the mobility to fight Indians. On 19 May 1846 President Polk signed a bill authorizing the

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20. Rowland, II, 303.

21. Davis, Papers, II, 528-529. Speech given 24 March 1846.

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establishment of a regiment of mounted riflemen.

These two proposals, the increase of the army by new regiments and the introduction of riflemen, were the basis for most of Davis's efforts to increase the army. On occasion he did support increases to the army by raising the number of privates, such as the bill reported on 20 February 1850 when he was in the Senate. That bill had been designed to increase the size of the army by manning all companies serving on the frontier with seventy-four privates, an increase of ten over the legal manning strength of companies at that time, and to encourage enlistments, by paying a bounty to recruits that enlisted at posts on the frontier equal to what it would have cost the army to transport them to that location.<sup>23</sup> This bill may have been a combination of the War Department's desire for larger companies and Davis's ideas on how to recruit enough soldiers. However, when that bill failed to pass, Davis recommended an<sup>24</sup> additional regiment.

Davis's recommendations in the 1853 report indicate that his ideas on the best method of increasing the army had not changed. Again he supported the addition of new regiments,

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22. Davis, Papers, II, 545-546.

23. Senate Journal, 31:1, p. 168. Portions of the Senate debate on that bill are printed in Rowland, I, 356-357.

24. Davis, Papers, IV, 355.

two of which he wanted to be composed of riflemen, instead of increasing the strength of the existing regiments as<sup>25</sup> Scott recommended in the accompanying documents. In 1854 Scott modified his recommendation to concur with Davis on the need for either three or four new regiments, but Scott continued to support the addition of cavalry and infantry<sup>26</sup> instead of riflemen as proposed by Davis.

Davis's efforts to increase the benefits of service were not limited solely to the previously mentioned pay increases. In every annual report submitted, he reiterated the necessity of providing the widows and orphans of army servicemen with the same pension benefits accorded to navy dependents. Army survivors were on occasion provided with benefits, but unlike their navy counterparts who were assured of a five year pension of half pay and allowances, army survivors were given an allowance only after special legislation was passed authorizing a pension for a specific group of survivors. Thus the benefits were not available except by special legislation, and the possibility existed that future Congresses might not approve such benefits. As a senator, Davis had reported a bill that would have placed

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25. Rowland, II, 305; Senate Executive Document #1, 33:1, volume II, part 2, 95. Scott also recommended adding new regiments, but he desired only two as opposed to Davis's recommendation for four.

26. Senate Executive Document #1, 33:2, part 2, 51.

army and navy dependents on the same footing.

The act of 4 August 1854 increasing the pay of the rank and file of the army did not provide for an increase of pay for the officer corps. It did not in part because Congress misunderstood the value of the additional allowances given to officers. Davis strongly supported an across-the-board raise for all officers, but he resisted efforts to raise the pay of individual officers.

Davis was certainly not alone in attempting to increase officers' pay. Increased pay was an issue of considerable concern throughout the officer corps. Davis received numerous petitions from individual officers and from entire regiments requesting increased pay and allowances.

Representative examples of the problems faced by the individual officer in supporting his family can be seen in the lives of Robert E. Lee and Alfred Mordecai.

Robert E. Lee was one of the most highly respected officers in the army prior to the Civil War. A distinguished graduate of the United States Military Academy and a highly decorated veteran of the Mexican War, Lee was justly considered one of the finest engineers in the army, yet he accepted a commission in the cavalry in order to increase

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27. Rowland, I, 542-543; Congressional Globe, 31:1, pp. 1972, 2002, 2068, 31:2, pp. 250-251.

28. Davis, Papers, V, 241, 283, 297.

his pay and allowances. On occasion, Lee had even considered resigning his commission in order to provide<sup>29</sup> adequately for his family.

Likewise, Alfred Mordecai, though not as well known as Lee, was internationally renowned as a scientist and generally considered as one of the best officers in the Ordnance corps. A "soldier-technologist," Mordecai played a critical role in the development of weapons. Unfortunately, Mordecai too felt the dilemma of providing for his family and serving his country. On 16 October 1854 Mordecai wrote to Davis and asked that the secretary use his influence with Congress to gain an increase in pay for the officers and<sup>30</sup> soldiers of the army.

Lee and Mordecai were two officers who were able to remain on active duty due to fortuitous circumstances; however, there were others who felt compelled to resign their commissions for more lucrative positions outside the army. The loss of highly qualified officers with the consequent decrease in the efficiency of the army was obvious to congressmen as well as to Davis and was a factor in the 1857 pay raise.

Davis also felt that there was a need for legislation to

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29. Douglas S. Freeman, Robert E. Lee: A Biography, 4 vol., (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), I, 181-183.

30. Davis, Papers, V, 265.

provide for regular retirement for officers. By regulation officers unable to perform their duties because of age or disabilities were retained on the rolls of the army until their death. Such officers were of no use to their regiment; even worse they slowed the promotion of younger officers who were actually on duty. A retired list would not be introduced until 1861, but on 21 February 1857, less than a month before Davis returned to the Senate, the pay of officers was increased.

What then was Davis's role in increasing the pay and size of the army, in providing for widows and orphans, and in creating a retired list? His biographers have given him a large share of the credit for each. A review of the evidence supports what his biographers and he himself claimed only with respect to increases in pay. As Davis said, "In making these suggestions I have had principally in view the improvement of the army . . . ." <sup>31</sup> Davis's use of the first person was in this case more than convention. His ideas for raising the pay of enlisted men -- for improving recruiting and reenlistment -- were clearly his own. These ideas went well beyond those of his predecessor and the commanding general and he had supported pay increases long before he became secretary of war.

He did no more to increase the size of the army than work

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31. Rowland, II, 302.



with others. In his 1853 annual report Davis did distinguish between his recommendation for expanding the army and Scott's, "This increase is materially less than that recommended by the commanding general . . . ." <sup>32</sup> And in the 1854 annual report Davis reaffirmed, "the absolute necessity of the increase which it was my duty to urge in my last annual report. I again solicit attention to this subject . . . ." <sup>33</sup> Davis had also supported bills to increase the size of the army before entering the War Department and continued to support them as secretary. But Davis was not the only advocate of an increase. Scott emphasized the need of an increase as had Conrad during his previous administration of the department. Continually recurring Indian conflicts provided sufficient evidence that the army was too small to meet its commitments. Although increases to the army's strength were authorized during Davis's administration, they were not necessarily due to his involvement. Based on prior recommendations for an increase and the evident need of those forces on the frontiers to protect the lives and property of immigrants and settlers, the increases of 1855 probably would have been approved whether or not Davis was the secretary of war. As noted above, it was James Shields's amendment to the army

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32. Rowland, II, 305.

33. Rowland, II, 392.

appropriations act that provided the strength increase, an increase that would not have been enacted by virtue of its inclusion in Davis's reorganization bill.

In recommending legislative action to provide a pension plan for army widows and orphans, regular retirement for officers, and an increase in the medical corps, Davis merely endorsed ideas long advocated by Conrad, Scott, and the military staff. Davis's wording in the 1853 report indicates he was emphasizing Scott's recommendation, "I concur fully in the views expressed by the commanding general in relation to the extension of the pension system to the widows and orphans . . . ."<sup>34</sup> And in 1854, "The subject has been repeatedly recommended by the Commanding General of the army . . . ."<sup>35</sup> Scott and Conrad had urged Congress to enact a pension plan prior to Davis's administration, and even though Davis had sponsored a bill in 1850 that would have enacted such a plan if it had been passed by Congress, it was apparently not a high priority for him. Perhaps Davis had sponsored the earlier bill at the urging of Conrad and Scott. Davis did raise the issue in all of his annual reports, but he never spent more than two or three sentences in the effort. Similarly, he advocated a retired list for officers and increases in the medical

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34. Rowland, II, 305.

35. Rowland, II, 397.

seacoast defenses. While endorsing the entire report of the Chief Engineer to Congress, Davis especially recommended appropriations for the fortification of Ship Island,<sup>59</sup> Mississippi, and the Columbia River. In his final annual report, he asked only for increased appropriations seacoast<sup>60</sup> defenses.

In summary, Davis's recommendations on the system of seacoast defenses were limited to brief comments on the continued effectiveness of such fortifications against naval attacks and a general exhortation to continue appropriating funds for the execution of planned construction. His only specific recommendations were for the fortification of Ship Island and the Columbia River.

For the army as a whole the system of seacoast defenses was not a vital concern; however, for the Corps of Engineers seacoast defenses were the single most important project upon which they labored. Engineers planned and supervised the construction of each and every fortification. Although Engineers were responsible for conducting surveys for canals and railroads, and although they divided responsibility for harbor and river improvements with the Topographical Engineers, they were primarily charged with preparing and maintaining seacoast defenses.

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59. Rowland, II, 561-562.

60. Rowland, II, 84-85.

and had been rendered obsolete by recent advances in both land transportation and naval weapons. Davis disagreed with both of these contentions and showed that rather than decreasing the necessity of seacoast defenses, recent advances in technology had increased their importance. Appropriations for both the construction of fortifications and the purchase of armaments for the fortifications in 1853 encouraged Davis to feel that the system of seacoast defenses had sufficient congressional support to insure its completion.<sup>57</sup>

In his 1854 annual report Davis again argued for seacoast defenses. Against the protests of those congressmen still unconvinced of the utility of permanent fortifications, Davis held up the Russian fortifications in the Crimea as evidence of the viability of fortifications against a modern naval attack. Davis did not, however, mention the fact that much of the Russians' success was due to the inability of the attacking ships to elevate their guns enough to reach the fortifications. Davis encouraged Congress to maintain the necessary appropriations and stated that he felt that the actions of the last two sessions gave "positive proof"<sup>58</sup> that the system would be completed.

In 1855 Davis finally made a specific recommendation for

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57. Rowland, II, 308-310.

58. Rowland, II, 409-410.

that at least on this issue he put sectional politics before national interests. In his annual reports Davis projected an image of an unbiased administrator, a friend to the army motivated solely by what was best for the nation. Focusing first on the operations and needs of the army and then progressing to his other assigned areas of responsibility, Davis seemed above politics. Yet his actions on the railroad question belie impartiality.<sup>56</sup>

What about his efforts to improve coastal defenses? The idea of a system of seacoast defenses to protect important harbors and seaboard cities originated after the War of 1812. The development of plans and construction of fortifications proceeded slowly, but significant funds were appropriated over the next forty years. Indeed, some congressmen felt that the fortifications were too expensive

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56. Notwithstanding the controversy over a route for the transcontinental railroad, selection of a southern route would have had only a limited effect on the development of the South. Although southern leaders have been criticized for their incredible shortsightedness in not building a viable transportation system, specifically a unified railroad network such as was developing in the North, this criticism overlooks the fact that the railroad performed different functions in the two areas. In the South, railroads moved staple exports from landlocked towns and fields to the numerous inland waterways, from there it was a cheap haul to the port cities and then to the overseas manufacturers; but in the North, the requirement was for a complex network of canals and rails that would facilitate the exchange of goods and produce between the agricultural and manufacturing regions. Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), p. 274.

to allow the president to select the best route for a transcontinental railroad because he wanted to ensure the<sup>52</sup> selection of a southern route.

Goetzmann concludes that Davis was biased in his recommendation of the southern route in that, "he saw the combination of scientific testimony and the demands of his own section irreproachable in the face of obvious Northern political and commercial pressures."<sup>53</sup> Davis recommended a southern route in ignorance of "the realities of the<sup>54</sup> political situation . . . ."

Davis's letters and speeches make it clear that he felt very strongly that the construction of railroads in general, and a transcontinental railroad along the southern route in particular, would be good for the South. But sectional, congressional opposition blocked the southern route, and the prospect of an eventual compromise on the 35th parallel route, with or without Davis's support, became impossible<sup>55</sup> with the outbreak of hostilities in Kansas and Nebraska.

Davis's efforts to secure a southern route for the projected transcontinental railroad lead to the conclusion

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52. William Goetzmann, Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 1959), pp. 273-274.

53. Goetzmann, p. 303.

54. Goetzmann, p. 304.

55. Goetzmann, p. 304.

promised that if elected he would consider railroad<sup>50</sup>  
construction as one of his highest priorities.

Soon after his appointment as secretary of war, Davis created a considerable political furor by a speech in Philadelphia in which he commented on the willingness of President Pierce to construct a railroad linking the East<sup>51</sup> and West coasts of the country. Northerners such as Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, remembering Davis's earlier opposition to internal improvements, interpreted his current support of a transcontinental railway as an effort to gain the coveted route for the South.

William H. Goetzmann in Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863 devotes several chapters to the numerous surveys conducted in search of a route for the projected transcontinental railroad. In his discussion of the Pacific railroad surveys, Goetzmann argued that Davis supported railroad construction to favor the South. Davis had first introduced legislation supporting wagon road surveys across Texas to prepare the way for railroad surveys. He played an important role in winning an appropriation for General James Gadsden whose negotiations led to the Gadsden Purchase. Davis supported the Gadsden Purchase and Senator Rusk's bill

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50. Rowland, II, 107.

51. Rowland, II, 242-245.

have praised Davis for putting aside his own southern sympathies while secretary of war, for taking a remarkably nationalist attitude toward his tasks. They have also praised him for completing surveys for a transcontinental railroad and for improving coastal fortifications as well as American waterways. Is this high praise justified? Was Davis able to be above sectional politics in dealing with Congress? And was he primarily responsible for the work done on railroad surveys, waterways, and coastal defenses during his administration of the War Department?

Davis was vitally interested in the construction of a Pacific railroad on the southern route. During his political career prior to appointment as secretary of war, he frequently spoke on the necessity of the South actively supporting the construction of railroads. After he left the House of Representatives to command the First Mississippi Regiment, Davis gave a speech explaining why he resigned and what he had accomplished in Congress. In that speech he commented on the eventual "chain of rail ways from the Mississippi at Vicksburg to the Atlantic . . . great sinews uniting into concentrated action the power of the right hand and the left . . ."<sup>49</sup> During the canvass of Mississippi in the gubernatorial campaign with Henry S. Foote, Davis

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49. Davis, Papers, III, 5-6.



The mode of appointment prevents its advantages from ever being confined to any class of society -- to any political party or geographical section; and as it is the first step in the military ladder, the army is thus furnished with a body of officers who represent the whole country, and who, by being reared in its service, may be expected to feel for the country as a whole, and in any and every contingency to provide a reliable bulwark for the common defense.[48]

How then should Davis's part in reorganizing the War department and improving the United States Military Academy be regarded? He was neither original nor successful in restructuring the War Department. He began with ideas of his predecessors, made his own synthesis of those ideas, but failed to win congressional support for them because he was unable to overcome the opposition of his bureau heads. Davis did not understand -- and his biographers have ignored -- the importance Congress placed on staff recommendations. He was no more original in his efforts to improve the United States Military Academy but he was more successful. He merely accepted the recommendation of the Board of Visitors or of his subordinates; and he had little trouble getting Congress to approve the additional funding.

Of all the projects that occupied Davis as secretary of war only three aroused sectional feelings: conducting surveys for a transcontinental railroad, building coastal defenses, and improving rivers and harbors. His biographers

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48. Rowland, III, 86.

secretary had been willing to approve a five-year course. Davis justified his decision on the basis of the relatively low educational level of some cadets at the time of their appointment. A longer course would benefit those appointees from the frontier states where schools were scarce and generally inferior to those of the older states. Davis hoped that the extension of the course of study would place West Point "within the reach of youths of every condition of life" and with the appointment procedure insure that "all sections and all parties are fairly represented."<sup>46</sup>

There is no doubt that Davis strongly supported the United States Military Academy or that he felt the academy was a critical element in the defense of the country. In a series of exchanges with Thomas Sawyer and Andrew Johnson on the floor of the House of Representatives between 28 May 1846 and 30 May 1846 Davis expressed his feelings about the importance of the academy in the education of the country's officers. It was at this time that Davis asked Sawyer whether he believed "a blacksmith or a tailor could have secured the same results." as the graduates of West Point<sup>47</sup> at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Davis's attitude toward the United States Military Academy was best expressed in his 1856 annual report:

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46. Rowland, II, 308.

47. Davis, Papers, II, 617.

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 of Visitors. In the appropriations act for the academy approved 6 August 1852, prior to Davis's appointment, \$3,000 was allocated specifically for "improvements and enlargements to officers' quarters."<sup>44</sup> The appropriations act approved 2 March 1853 included \$8,000 for a stable. Funds for the improvements to the cadet hospital were in the 1854 support act as well as \$25,000 for a cavalry exercise hall. The funding for general repairs and improvements, including repairs to officers' quarters was increased by \$5,295 from 1854 to 1855, the additional funds possibly earmarked for improvements to officers' quarters. The 1856 appropriations act included an extra \$10,000 for additional<sup>45</sup> stables. All of this funding appears to have been no more than incremental increases designed to improve the physical plant of the academy; the funding was not, it seems, the result of a sudden interest of a secretary of war.

Davis was responsible for the extension of the academy's course of instruction from four to five years. This extension had been under discussion for several years; however, it was not until Davis's administration that a

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43. See the superintendent's report in the accompanying documents to the annual report of the secretary of war for the years 1853-1856.

44. Statutes at Large, 32:1, 29.

45. Statutes at Large, 33:1, 277; 33:2, 703; 34:1, 5.

Was Davis any more original in proposing or successful in promoting improvements to the United States Military Academy? His biographers say that he persuaded Congress to build additional quarters for officers assigned to the academy and a cadet hospital; Strode says that he was also primarily responsible for construction of a riding hall and stables. What can now be said about these claims?

In each of his annual reports, Davis specifically stated that he concurred with the recommendations of either the Board of Visitors, civilians and soldiers appointed to inspect the academy annually, or the chief engineer, the military staff head exercising supervisory responsibility for the operations of the academy. He did support the construction of additional officers's quarters as proposed by the Board of Visitors, but he did not even mention any other building projects in his annual reports.<sup>42</sup>

During Davis's tenure, there were improvements to the cadet hospital and officer housing, as well as construction of a riding hall and additional stables but these were long standing needs of the academy identified by the superintendent at each of the annual visits of the Board

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42. Rowland, II, 409.

had recommended in his annual reports.

Had Davis doubted that the bill would pass, he would scarcely have submitted it to Congress. However, by 25 January 1855 he realized that passage of the entire bill was impossible. On that date he wrote to Charles J. Faulkner, chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs, and suggested separate bills for a strength increase, improved officer pay, a staff reorganization, a retired list, and regulations for rank and command. He hoped Congress would pass as many of the individual measures as possible.<sup>40</sup>

Davis's action indicates his recognition that there were limits to what he could accomplish as secretary of war.

Davis continued to lobby for changes in the organization of the War Department throughout his tenure as secretary; however, the tone of his comments indicated that he gave them little chance for implementation. As he wrote to Congress in 1855 in almost a patronizing manner,

They appear too clear to me to need to be enforced by argument, and I hope that the evils which the bare statement of the facts expose will not be suffered to exist after the subject shall have secured the considerable attention of Congress.[41]

Such wording was ill-calculated to gain the support of a recalcitrant Congress.

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40. Davis, Papers, V, 97-99.

41. Rowland, II, 557.

them.

Abolishing staff commissions and replacing them with line commissions would allow either the secretary of war or the commanding general, depending on which was the stronger, effectively to control the military staff. This proposal drove a majority of the staff heads to oppose adamantly the proposed reorganization. The advantages to be gained by the army as a whole were not sufficient to persuade the staff heads to relinquish their autonomous status.<sup>38</sup>

As noted above, Davis's recommendation for the abolition of staff commissions was not an original idea; but his proposal, entitled "A Bill for the Increase and Better Organization of the Army," went much farther. There were sixteen sections in this bill, including abolition of staff commissions, an increase of the army by six regiments, a reduction of the artillery by half -- the soldiers to be redesignated infantry and to form two of the six proposed regiments -- an increase of engineers, and a consolidation of the Corps of Engineers and the Topographical Engineers. In addition, the pay of officers was to be increased and a retired list for officers introduced.<sup>39</sup> In effect, Davis attempted to achieve in one bill many of the innovations he

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38. The comments of the various staff heads and selected other officers on the proposed reorganization can be found in House Executive Report #40, 33:2, pp. 16-43.

39. New American State Papers, XI, 296-304.

and Prussian organizations, commenting on their peculiar characteristics. He also justified an officer retired list, already proposed in 1853, by showing the advantages that would accrue to the army through such a list.<sup>36</sup>

Actually, most of the features of Davis's proposal specifically related to reorganizing the War Department had been suggested in April 1852 by secretary of war Conrad. In response to a request by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Conrad discussed the needs of the War Department with Winfield Scott and suggested that all of the staff officers, except for the respective staff heads, be reassigned to a regiment.<sup>37</sup> This was also the crux of Davis's proposal.

This proposal appealed to both the secretary of war and the commanding general because it removed the independence of the staff heads. Under the status quo the separate staff departments were in many ways autonomous fiefdoms. Officers within the staff departments were responsible only to their department heads. On the positive side, separate departments supposedly insured an experienced and dedicated military staff. On the negative side, staff commissions could not be revoked without cashiering those who held

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36. Rowland, II, 397-408.

37. New American State Papers, Benjamin F. Cooling, ed., (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1979), XI, 289-294.

corps, but in so doing, he merely supported what others had long advocated.

If then Davis's biographers were too generous in their praise of his efforts to increase the size of the army and the benefits for widows, orphans, and officers, were they any more accurate in describing his role in reorganizing the War Department and improving the United States Military Academy? Dodd argued that Davis was primarily responsible for persuading Congress to reorganize the War Department and improve West Point. Although Weigley believed that Davis had failed in his efforts to change the administration of the War Department, Winston essentially agree with Dodd's conclusion that Davis had been instrumental in improvements to the academy. But what do the Davis Papers say?

Davis devoted over a third of his 1854 annual report to a discussion of the urgent need for a reorganization of the War Department. He discussed at length the problems in the present system: the "many unseemly controversies" resulting from the proliferation of brevet ranks and the confusion over who had the right to command, the difficulties of devising a rule to cover both line and staff commissions and insuring that officers on the staff were highly qualified for those critical positions, and the arbitrary designation of soldiers as artillery even though they were armed and functioned as infantry. As a standard with which to compare the United States system, Davis used the French, English,



To judge by his annual reports, Davis drew his ideas for seacoast defenses almost exclusively from his chief of engineers, Joseph Totten. A comparison of the relevant portions of Davis's and Totten's 1853 reports shows that much of Davis's report was taken almost verbatim from Totten. Davis also cited an earlier report by Totten to the House of Representatives in 1851 as covering the subject of seacoast defenses, "so fully, that it is not deemed<sup>61</sup> necessary to add more on this occasion." In 1854 Davis referred his readers to the report of the chief engineer for information on the condition of the seacoast defenses. In 1855 Davis recommended that the chief engineer's report receive a favorable consideration, and in 1856 he again referred readers to the same report for the condition of the defenses.

It might seem that Davis merely acquiesced in the chief engineer's recommendations because he lacked knowledge or interest in the work of the corps. Such was not the case. Davis was no mere political appointee with little or no practical military. Even though he had graduated too low in his class at West Point to be commissioned in the Corps of Engineers, his graduation from that institution required a theoretical understanding of basic military engineering.

Moreover, while in Congress he had taken a strong interest

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61. Rowland, II, 309.

in the construction of the system of seacoast defenses. As early as 8 January 1844 Davis criticized the allocation of appropriations on the basis of the sectional distribution of the fortifications. In his opinion, the lack of fortifications on the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts was an example of the northern majority abusing the southern minority<sup>62</sup> -- northern harbors and cities had received a majority of the effort while the South was left unprotected.

Davis had long supported the fortification of the harbor and establishment of a navy yard at Ship Island, Mississippi. In his 1845 canvass of Mississippi for election to the House of Representatives, Davis clearly stated his opposition to Memphis, Tennessee, as a navy yard and his preference for Ship Island. After his election, Davis continued his efforts to secure the selection of Ship Island<sup>63</sup> as a navy yard and thereby insure its fortification. In a speech at Jackson, Mississippi in 1848, he explained that Ship Island was the logical choice for a navy yard, and "was necessary as connected with the defence of the coast . . . and that it would open a rich source of wealth to the people of East Mississippi . . . ."<sup>64</sup>

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62. Davis, Papers, II, 73-74.

63. Davis, Papers, II, 73-74, 309-310, 334-335, 409-410.

64. Davis, Papers, III, 377.

If as secretary of war Davis did no more to encourage seacoast defense than follow the recommendations of the chief engineer, he may well have sought to avoid any appearance of favoring the South. By allowing the chief engineer to recommend fortifications on the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, Davis protected appropriations for the system of seacoast defenses from sectional jealousies.<sup>65</sup> Congress voted funds to fortify Ship Island. Was Davis equally astute in dealing with federally funded engineering projects designed to facilitate navigation of harbors and rivers throughout the country? The use of government revenues to fund a system of internal improvements provided fuel for divisive political debates from the early 1820's until the outbreak of the Civil War. Although overshadowed toward the end of the period by the introduction of the more emotional abolition issue, the constitutionality of a system of internal improvements was a source of continuing political controversy.

The controversy resurfaced in 1851 at the introduction of a bill in Congress to appropriate funds for improvements to various harbors and rivers. The bill subsequently passed, and supervision of the engineering projects was assigned to

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65. Statutes at Large, 34:3, 191; 33:1, 347. On 3 March 1857 Congress approved \$100,000 for the fortification of Ship Island. Ship Island did not receive an appropriation in the previous fortifications act approved 3 August 1854.

the War Department. Secretary Conrad divided responsibility for the projects between the Corps of Engineers and the Topographical Engineers. The Corps of Engineers received operational control of those projects on the eastern seaboard and the Gulf Coast while the Topographical Engineers were responsible for those on the Mississippi<sup>66</sup> River and on the Great Lakes.

By the time Davis became secretary of war, Conrad had already approved many of the construction plans for improving harbors and rivers. Many of these early plans were for extensive projects that could be completed only with additional funds. Davis refused to support such plans: "In determining upon the few plans that have been submitted to me, my view has been that such only should be adopted as<sup>67</sup> could be executed with the existing appropriations." He recommended to Congress that the states be authorized to collect tonnage duties in order to raise the necessary<sup>68</sup> revenues to fund the improvements. In 1854 Davis noted that most work on the construction projects had stopped due to a lack of funds. In addition he voiced his opinion on the advisability of future appropriations saying, "no benefit at all commensurate with the expense has been

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66. Senate Executive Document #1, 32:2, continuation, 9.

67. Rowland, II, 321.

68. Rowland, II, 324.

obtained, or is to be expected, from appropriations granted and applied in the mode heretofore pursued."<sup>69</sup>

In both 1855 and 1856 Davis said that work on harbors and rivers had effectively ceased due to a lack of funding. He recommended distributing remaining funds, such as they were, to the responsible local officials for action as they deemed proper.<sup>70</sup>

But why did Davis oppose internal improvements and what, if anything, did that opposition say about his role in the War Department? Davis's endorsement of thirteen resolutions proposed for adoption by the Mississippi Democratic party as a state platform in 1844 is the first indication of his stand on the issue of internal improvements. Davis served on a select committee which approved the proposal of Major Koger of Noxubee, Mississippi, including a resolution that the Constitution does not authorize a "general system of internal improvements."<sup>71</sup>

In March of 1846 during a debate in the House of Representatives, Davis attacked the "pork barrel" approach to legislation for improving harbors and rivers. His criticism was based on limited appropriations for southern projects and the fact that improvements were used by

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69. Rowland, II, 415.

70. Rowland, III, 88.

71. Davis, Papers, II, 68-71.

northerners as justification for a revenue producing, as  
 opposed to a protective, tariff.<sup>72</sup> Davis later stated that  
 the "modification of the tariff" to "raise revenue by impost  
 duties" was one of the three most important political issues  
 discussed during his year in the House of Representatives.  
 Davis strongly opposed a tariff for revenue.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, Davis was proud of his opposition to a system of  
 general improvements:

"therein [his opposition to internal  
 improvements] was manifested my fixed opinion on  
 the taxing and expending powers of the federal  
 government, my . . . avowed creed of strict  
 construction for the constitution of our  
 Union." [74]

Davis's feelings on congressional funding of internal  
 improvements were consistent. In his remarks on the  
 proposed Cumberland Island Dam bill in 1848, Davis suggested  
 that the proper source of revenues for internal improvements  
 was a duty on river traffic so that those benefitting from  
 improvements paid for them.<sup>75</sup> In March 1851 Davis supported  
 Pierre Soule in an attempt to defeat appropriations for

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72. Davis, Papers, II, 512.

73. Davis, Papers, II, 698-699.

74. Davis, Papers, III, 207.

75. Davis, Papers, III, 295-301.

another harbors and rivers bill;<sup>76</sup> and in July 1851, in one of his speeches while campaigning for governor of Mississippi, he argued that the Northwest rivers should be improved with funds raised through taxes on tonnage shipped on the rivers. Such a method of raising revenues would have the dual advantages of taxing those actually receiving the benefit of the improvements and of providing the most funds<sup>77</sup> to rivers with the heaviest traffic. As noted above, Davis's recommendations as secretary of war on the proper source of funding for improvements to harbors and rivers can be seen in his earlier political career.

It seems clear that Davis's opposition to the harbors and rivers appropriations of 1852 was fundamentally based on his political beliefs. Here, as in his stand on railroads and fortifications, he was a strong partisan of the South. On these three issues his biographers have been too generous: he was not nearly so nationalistic as they asserted. Nor was he so constructive a secretary of war. He delayed construction of a transcontinental railroad and the improvement of American waterways.

Indeed, his biographers have in general overemphasized Davis's role in initiating and gaining congressional support

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76. Davis, Papers, IV, 172; Congressional Globe, 31:2, Appendix, 365-368.

77. Davis, Papers, IV, 202-203.

for many of the projects associated with his administration of the War Department; and they have underemphasized his political, sectional biases. He was, as his biographers said, responsible for persuading Congress to experiment with camels on the frontier; he did take an original approach to using pay increases to solve persistent recruiting and reenlistment problems; and he got congressional approval for his pay increases. But more often when dealing with projects that required congressional funding he was not so innovative or important as his biographers have claimed. In increasing the size of the army and of the medical corps, in attempting to reorganize the army and provide for widows and orphans and retirement of officers, and in improving the United States Military Academy, he merely approved what others had begun or recommended; and he had no major role in getting Congress to support any of these projects. Moreover, in selecting a route for a transcontinental railroad, in building coastal fortifications, and in improving harbors and rivers, he was far more the southern politician and less the creative, impartial secretary of war than his biographers have allowed. In fact, he obstructed a compromise that might have allowed a transcontinental railroad, and he opposed further federal spending for the development of rivers and harbors.



## Chapter 3

### Executive Actions

Although Davis depended on Congress to provide the necessary appropriations and statutory changes to support innovations in the army, he had, by virtue of his position as the secretary of war, the authority to act on a variety of other matters without the assistance of Congress. Historians have frequently concluded that Davis used his executive authority to work a number of important changes in the army: to improve weapons, to develop light infantry tactics, to revise army regulations, to relocate armories, and to send a commission to the Crimean War. How reliable are these conclusions?

The replacement of the Model 1842 smoothbore musket by the Model 1855 rifle musket was a landmark event in the development of military weapons technology. The Model 1855 rifle musket and its somewhat improved variants, Models 1861, 1863, and 1864 rifle muskets, are generally regarded as the primary reason for the massive casualties of the Civil War. Never before had the individual infantryman possessed a weapon allowing him effectively to outrange

field artillery on the battlefield; Dodd, Strode, and Weigley all credit Davis with bringing the rifle musket to the army.

When Davis entered the department the standard weapon of the Infantry of the line was the Model 1842 musket. The Model 1842 musket was a smoothbore, .69 caliber, percussion weapon. Thomas Warner, the Master Armorer at Springfield Armory, designed the Model 1842 musket and in 1845 it was in production at both the Springfield Armory and the Harpers Ferry Armory. The Model 1842 musket was itself an important technological development because it was the first percussion weapon issued to the line Infantry and it was the first weapon made at both national armories with fully<sup>1</sup> interchangeable parts.

In addition to the Model 1842 musket the national armories also manufactured the Model 1841 rifle. This was a rifled, .54 caliber, percussion weapon. It was ordinarily issued to not more than two companies of an Infantry regiment. These two light companies were routinely assigned the mission of acting as skirmishers for the entire regiment. Benjamin Moor, the Master Armorer of the Harpers Ferry Armory,

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1. Merrit Roe Smith, Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.), pp. 281. Additional information on the development of the manufacturing methods and inspection techniques which allowed interchangeability of parts can be found in Felicia J. Deyrup's Arms Making in the Connecticut Valley, (York, Pennsylvania: George Shumway, 1970).

designed the Model 1841 rifle, completing the patterns and gauges in November 1841. Full-scale production began at Harpers Ferry Armory in 1846 and continued until the mid-1850's. The Model 1841 was also manufactured by several private contractors, the most famous being Eli Whitney, Jr., the manufacturer who provided the Model 1841 rifles used by<sup>2</sup> Jefferson Davis's Mississippi riflemen in the Mexican War.

In addition to the Model 1841 rifle and Model 1842 musket, the army also possessed large quantities of earlier weapons originally manufactured with flintlock priming and subsequently altered to the percussion system. This relatively inexpensive modification made the earlier models as serviceable as the latest models in all respects except ease of repair. A replacement part for one of the earlier models had to be hand fitted by a qualified armorer.

Thus an infantry regiment armed with the latest weapons at the time Davis entered the War Department had eight companies with the Model 1842 musket and two companies with the Model 1841 rifle. In combat the two light companies were deployed as skirmishers to harass the enemy and keep enemy skirmishers away from the main body of friendly troops, and the remaining eight companies were deployed in a two-rank, linear formation in the traditional European manner.

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2. Smith, p. 281; Davis, Papers, IV, 700.

Neither the 1842 musket nor the tactics in which it was employed were well suited to fighting Indians on the western frontier. The accuracy of the muskets of that period is best described by a British army officer, Colonel Hanger, who wrote,

A soldier's musket, if not exceedingly ill-bored, as many are, will strike the figure of a man at 80 yards; it may even at a hundred, but a soldier must be very unfortunate indeed who shall be wounded by a common musket at 150 yards, provided his antagonist aims at him; and, as to firing at a man at 200 yards, with a common musket, you may just as well fire at the moon. No man was ever killed by a musket at 200 yards by the person who aimed at him.[3]

Although Colonel Hanger was writing in 1814 in reference to the British "Brown Bess," his remarks are equally relevant to the Model 1842 musket, the only difference between the two weapons being the percussion priming of the later weapon. In 1860 Ordnance Department tests of rifled weapons, a .69 caliber smoothbore flintlock musket included for comparison confirmed Colonel Hanger's earlier comment; fifty shots fired at a ten foot square target achieved only twenty-four hits at 200 yards and, at 300 yards, only  
<sup>4</sup>  
 seven.

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 3. Berkeley Lewis, Small Arms and Ammunition in the United States Service, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1956), p. 90.

4. Claude E. Fuller, The Rifled Musket, (Harrisburg: Stackpole, 1958), p. 53.

The Model 1841 rifle was not included in the above mentioned tests, but its relative accuracy may be deduced by a reference to an actual incident which occurred during the attack on Monterrey in the Mexican War involving Davis's Mississippi riflemen. The First Mississippi Regiment had been in the vanguard of the American forces attacking the Teneria, one of the Mexican fortified outposts guarding Monterrey. As nightfall approached, the American troops were ordered to fall back, and Davis's riflemen were the last to withdraw. Mexican cavalry attempted to harass the withdrawing Americans and in the ensuing conflict two enemy soldiers were "brought from their saddles" at a range of "60<sup>5</sup> or 70 yards" by Mississippi riflemen. Although this may not sound like remarkable shooting, it could not have been done with a musket.

Having examined in considerable detail the standard weapons of the army at the time Davis entered the War Department, we are now ready to discuss the weapons adopted during Davis's tenure. The Model 1855 rifle musket was a .58 caliber, Maynard primed, rifle utilizing a cylindro-conical hollow based bullet. It differed in four ways from earlier rifles. First, it was of larger caliber than the previous rifle. Second, while it was a percussion type of ignition, and could utilize the same percussion caps

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5. Davis, Papers, III, 73.

as earlier percussion weapons, the Maynard lock allowed the use of a roll of percussion primers resembling a roll of modern day caps for a child's toy gun. This ignition system reduced the time it took to load the weapon and obviated the difficulties of placing a percussion cap on the percussion cone at night or in cold weather when the soldier was wearing gloves. Third, the rifling in the barrel of the weapon was also different, consisting of three grooves each .3 inch wide, decreasing in depth from .015 inch at the breech to .005 inch at the muzzle, with a uniform twist of one turn in six feet of barrel. Finally, and most important, the ammunition was the cylindro-conical hollow based bullet or Minie ball as it subsequently came to be called. With these modifications the Model 1855 rifle musket was capable of hitting a man on horseback at 600 yards and had sufficient momentum at 1,000 yards to penetrate four inches of soft pine. Perhaps a more telling indication of its accuracy was that at 500 yards the Model 1855 rifle musket was expected to put ten consecutive shots<sup>6</sup> in a twenty-seven inch bullseye. As Claude Fuller, the leading authority on the rifle musket, puts it, the Model 1842 musket with spherical ball ammunition produced recoil,<sup>7</sup> noise, and smoke; but the Model 1855 rifle musket could

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6. Fuller, pp. 4-5.

7. Fuller, p. 3.

According to one scholar, Davis assigned Alfred Mordecai the task of coordinating the revision of regulations in 1855 under the supervision of the Judge Advocate.<sup>34</sup> Davis was aware of Mordecai's capabilities. In 1850 Davis introduced special legislation to compensate Mordecai for his revision of the Ordnance Manual.<sup>35</sup> Soon after becoming secretary of war, Davis personally selected Mordecai to investigate claims of fraud.<sup>36</sup> Davis knew, moreover, of Mordecai's internationally acclaimed experiments with gunpowder and his research on ballistics, his service on the Ordnance Board since its inception, his compilation of military laws into the organized and extremely useful A Digest of the Laws Relating to the Military Establishment of the United States, and his prominent role in developing an American system of artillery, Artillery for the United States Land Service,<sup>37</sup> published in 1849.

Davis probably did appoint Mordecai, but there is no evidence that Davis played a large part in revising army regulations. He probably did suggest at least one change. In both the 1841 and 1847 regulations an article entitled, "The Commander of the Army," outlined the duties of the

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34. Falk, II, 467.

35. Davis, Papers, IV, 323-324.

36. Davis, Papers, V, 202-203; Falk, II, 377-380.

37. Falk, I, 150-151, 284; II, 344-349.

exaggerated claims of historians.

What about Davis's role in the revision of army regulations? At the time he entered the War Department, army regulations had not been completely revised since 1841.<sup>30</sup> There had been a partial revision in 1847 when, during William L. Marcy's tenure as secretary of war, the supply of the 1841 edition was exhausted.<sup>31</sup>

The revised regulations published during Davis's tenure were apparently completed in November or December of 1856; at least Davis then wrote Franklin Pierce saying that the revision had been delayed in hopes that Congress would pass legislation settling, "the vexed questions regarding rank and command."<sup>32</sup> There are few other references to the actual revision of the regulations in Davis's correspondence: one letter to Robert McClelland asking that he review the proposed regulations on Indian affairs and letters from McClelland, Thomas Jesup, Thomas Lawson, and Charles Thomas concerning the proposed changes.<sup>33</sup>

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30. U. S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1841, (Washington: J. and G. S. Gideon, 1841).

31. U.S. War Department, General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1847, (Washington: J. and G. S. Gideon, 1847).

32. National Archives, M-127, r-6, 6:125.

33. National Archives, M-6, r-38, fr 200; M-221, r-180, fr 323-327; M-567, r-540, fr 91-95.



the time of Gwin's letter. In fact Davis did little more to support Hardee's work than approve his request for French<sup>28</sup> equipment and uniforms for riflemen.

Although not a collaborator in the preparation of Hardee's system, Davis did support its introduction into the army. On 3 November 1856 Davis directed that troops acting as light infantry or riflemen be instructed with Hardee's system whenever possible; and on 15 December 1856 he decided that although the cadets at the military academy had to be instructed in both light infantry and line infantry tactics,<sup>29</sup> they should be "habitually exercised as light infantry."

It is clear that Davis understood the tactical implications of the increased range and accuracy of the improved weapons being introduced into the army. His comments in the annual reports of 1854, 1855, and 1856 clearly indicate his awareness of the increased effectiveness of the new weapons. His insistence on the instruction of officers and men in the new system whenever possible indicates his support for the new system, although not to the total exclusion of the old system. But there is no evidence of Davis's actual involvement in the formulation of the new system of tactics, nothing to support the more

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28. Davis, Papers, V, 351, 377. Endorsements dated 16 June 1854 and 9 October 1854.

29. Davis, Papers, V, 341; Davis endorsement dated 15 December 1856, RG 94, GL 1118-1121.

on Davis's annual reports; and this assertion is not borne out by a review of Davis's correspondence. William M. Gwin wrote Davis on 18 May 1854 and asked for War Department assistance for Thomas Duncan in the preparation of a new system of tactics. Davis referred the letter to Samuel Cooper, the Adjutant General, for an opinion; and on 23 May 1854 Cooper wrote Davis that Hardee was already working on  
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 such a system of tactics.

There are two conclusions that can be drawn from this exchange. First, Davis either was not aware of Hardee's work or had had such a minimal contact with it that he did not think of it upon reading Gwin's letter. In either case Davis could hardly be described as working closely on the new tactics. A second possibility is that Archibald Campbell, Davis's chief clerk, played a greater role in reviewing Davis's incoming correspondence than currently acknowledged; however, in this case the referral to Cooper for an opinion was endorsed and signed by Davis.

Subsequent correspondence also indicates that Davis was only minimally involved. On 28 July 1854 two months after Cooper's letter to Davis, Cooper recommended that officers at the United States Military Academy evaluate Hardee's  
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 tactics. Hardee's work must have been almost completed at

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 26. Davis, Papers, V, 341.

27. Davis, Papers, V, 341.

180. The second way of increasing the speed of tactical evolutions was by streamlining movements and commands. In Scott's system it was an involved process to deploy troops from a column into a linear attack formation. Hardee's system allowed deployment at a more rapid pace because it did not require troops to halt after each facing<sup>24</sup> movement.

In many respects, though, the two systems were very similar. Both systems required soldiers to form in two ranks only thirteen inches apart, and in both soldiers maintained contact with adjoining soldiers by touching elbows. Thus Hardee retained the most dangerous aspect of Scott's system, large bodies of tightly formed troops. But not until 1917 would tacticians resolve this conflict between the commander's need for tight formations to insure control of his men and the soldiers' need for dispersed formations to insure their survival.

In Attack and Die Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson state that Davis "worked closely" with Hardee in his adaptation of the new tactics.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately they base this assertion

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24. I have used Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson's Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage, (University, Alabama: University of Alabama, 1982) pp. 49-56, as a source for the discussion of the differences between the tactical systems of Scott and Hardee.

25. McWhiney and Jamieson, pp. 48-49.

those editions are generally referred to as Scott's Infantry  
<sup>22</sup>  
Tactics.

The new system of tactics introduced during Davis's tenure as secretary of war was William J. Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics; for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops  
<sup>23</sup>  
when acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen. Hardee adapted, some would say translated, his Tactics from a French manual on the subject.

The primary difference between the systems of Hardee and Scott was the speed at which tactical evolutions were conducted, Hardee's being somewhat faster. This speed was accomplished in two ways. First, two additional marching rates were introduced, the double quick time and the run. Soldiers marching at the double quick were expected to take thirty-three inch steps at a rate of 165 steps a minute, as opposed to Scott's fastest rate which was an accelerated quick time of 140 twenty-eight inch steps a minute. In addition to double quick time, Hardee also introduced the run which increased the number of steps taken in a minute to

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 22. Infantry Tactics; or Rules for the Exercises and Manoeuvres of the Infantry of the United States (Washington: Davis & Force, 1825). Major-General Winfield Scott, Infantry Tactics; or Rules for the Exercises and Manoeuvres of the Infantry of the United States New Edition (Franklin Square: Harper & Brothers, 1858).

23. William J. Hardee, Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics; for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops when acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen, 2 vols., (Philadelphia, 1855).

improved models or even the modification of a large quantity of the older weapons stored in the nation's arsenals and depots. As of 21 January 1861 production of Model 1855 rifles and rifle muskets at the national armories totalled only 35,335 weapons.<sup>21</sup>

From a practical standpoint, Davis's decision to forego the development of an unproven weapon in favor of increased production of a superior available weapon must be commended. But on the whole Davis contributed much less to the new weapons of 1855 than his biographers have claimed. He merely presided over the War Department when the rifle musket and the cylindro-conical hollow based bullet were brought to fruition. His hopes for the pistol carbine proved unfounded.

One of the first American systems of tactics was Infantry Tactics; or Rules for the Exercises and Manoeuvres of the Infantry of the United States, adopted by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun on 5 January 1825. This book was republished with minor revisions as late as 1858. Major-General Winfield Scott had served as President of the board of officers responsible for the first edition of the tactics; however, in subsequent editions Scott was listed as the author, and

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21. Fuller, p. 2. United States arsenals contained another 541,565 percussion muskets and rifles that had not been altered to fire the .58 caliber cylindro-conical hollow based bullet.

fact he worked against the introduction of breechloaders. In 1854 Congress appropriated \$90,000 for the purchase of breechloading weapons to test their suitability for military service. Despite the submission of numerous prototypes and several tests of the weapons by boards of officers, Davis never authorized a large purchase of breechloaders. In 1857 Craig recommended the purchase of 1,000 Sharps carbines, one of the best of the pre-metallic cartridge designs; but Davis<sup>19</sup> disapproved that purchase. After Davis returned to the Senate, he fought against the appropriation of funds for the purchase of breechloaders by his successor in the War<sup>20</sup> Department, John B. Floyd.

Davis's objections to breechloaders appear to have been two-fold: first, that they were less effective than contemporary muzzleloading weapons; and second, that purchasing breechloading weapons reduced the funds available for the production of the greatly superior muzzleloading weapons introduced in 1855. Despite Davis's repeated attempts to obtain additional funds for the production of the newly adopted rifled weapons, Congress never approved an increase in appropriations for that purpose. Davis was never able to undertake the large scale manufacture of the

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19. National Archives, Letter from Craig to Davis dated 3 January 1857, RG 156, 11:459-460; Davis endorsement dated 13 January 1857, M-444, r-3, fr 496.

20. Congressional Globe, 35:1, pp. 2780-2784, 2788-2789.

Davis wrote to Craig asking that the Ordnance Board consider arms for the cavalry.<sup>16</sup> The development of the new models of small arms continued the following year; and in 1855, when the Ordnance Board submitted its recommendations on the proposed arms to Davis for approval, he directed that the rifled pistol be provided a removable stock so that it could serve as a carbine for mounted troops.<sup>17</sup>

If the Model 1855 pistol carbine was the weapon Davis was most responsible for introducing, his impact on army weapons was rather limited. Production of the pistol carbine totalled only 4,021 weapons. Although a novel design, the pistol carbine soon showed its limitations in field use; and competition from Samuel Colt's repeating revolvers designed with the same removable stocks made the 1855 pistol carbine obsolete. Indeed, the War Department discontinued production of the pistol carbine in 1857 shortly after Davis<sup>18</sup> returned to the Senate.

In light of Davis's demonstrated interest in weapons suited to the peculiar requirements of mounted soldiers, he might have been expected to champion the introduction of breechloading weapons into the United States service. In

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16. Davis, Papers, V, 356.

17. Davis, Papers, V, 431; Fuller, p. 5.

18. Norm Flayderman, Flayderman's Guide to Antique Firearms, 2nd ed., (Northfield, Illinois: DBI, 1980), p. 293.

approved the lock in principle stating that it had "great practical utility . . . applicable to small arms for the military and naval service . . . " but noted several defects in its construction and returned it to Maynard for modification. Maynard quickly corrected the deficiencies found by the board and on 18 March 1845 signed a contract granting the army the right to use his patent in the manufacture of weapons. During the next six years, the army manufactured 4,000 weapons using Maynard's lock; and on 24 December 1851 Craig recommended to Scott the purchase of Maynard's patent.<sup>15</sup>

The preceding discussion clearly indicates that Davis did not play a primary part in the development or adoption of either rifled weapons or the cylindro-conical hollow based bullet. The interest of the Ordnance Department in monitoring European developments and the ongoing experiments which Davis merely approved show that the technological developments would have proceeded whether or not Davis had been secretary.

Nevertheless, there was one area of development in which Davis played a major role -- the development of weapons specifically for mounted units. On 10 and 14 July 1854

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15. U.S. War Department, Ordnance Department Reports, I, 22, 28-29; II, 412.



driven into the breech with a mallet. Use of a bullet smaller than the bore of the weapon necessitated deformation of the bullet once it reached the breech by a method such as Delvigne's chamber or Thouvenin's stem. Both of these methods required the individual soldier to strike the bullet with a four foot stick just hard enough to deform the rear of the bullet, but not hard enough to split the bullet or break the end of the ramrod. Military service required a simpler method of insuring uniform expansion.

A solution was an elongated bullet, smaller in diameter than the bore of the weapon, allowing the bullet to slide easily to the breech. An iron plug in the base of the bullet was driven into the bullet by the pressure of the exploding gunpowder thereby expanding the rear of the bullet so that it came into contact with the grooves in the bore of the weapon. It was not until Huger's experiments at Harpers Ferry Armory between 1853 and 1854 that James H. Burton, the acting Master Armorer of the armory, removed the plug from the base of the cylindro-conical bullet making it a  
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cylindro-conical hollow based bullet.

War Department approval of Maynard's lock came even earlier. Doctor Edward Maynard originally submitted his patent lock for testing in 1844. The first board of officers considering the invention met on 29 January 1845. This board

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that they were believed to be of sufficient value and interest to warrant their publication for general distribution; and that they would be prepared and presented with that view.[11]

Brevet Colonel Benjamin Huger had conducted the earliest of these experiments at Harpers Ferry Armory in 1853 and 1854.<sup>12</sup> However, Ordnance Department interest in European innovations began much earlier. Peter V. Hagner was ordered to Europe on 9 October 1848 to investigate recent developments in weapons technology. Hagner's report, dated 25 October 1849, comments on percussion cap production and on developments in small arms and artillery. Hagner's report went into detail on French efforts to introduce rifling into small arms including comments on Delvigne's experiments, Thouvenin's "carabine a la tige," and the<sup>13</sup> cylindro-conical bullet.

The problem with rifled weapons prior to the development of the hollow based bullet was that they took much longer to reload than smoothbore weapons. Bullets large enough to contact the rifling inside the bore of the weapon had to be

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11. U.S. War Department, Reports of Experiments with Small Arms for the Military Service, by Officers of the Ordnance Department, U.S. Army, (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1856), p. 3.

12. U.S. War Department, Reports of Experiments, pp. 11-27.

13. U.S. War Department, A Collection of Annual Reports and other Important Papers, Relating to the Ordnance Department, Taken from the Records of the Office of the chief of ordnance, from Public Documents, and from other Sources, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), II, 290-336.

pistol with a rifled barrel ten inches long and a detachable stock which allowed it to be used as a carbine by mounted  
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troops.

In 1854 Davis had indicated that he ordered experiments into the effects of rifling and improved ammunition. It is possible that Davis ordered experiments based on his own perception of the importance of foreign weapons; it is also possible that he merely approved experiments recommended by the chief of ordnance, Henry Craig. The latter seems more likely. There is no evidence in the Davis Papers to show that he alone directed experiments. However, on numerous occasions Craig forwarded reports of experiments to Davis; and he requested authorization to publish a collection of the findings of several of those experiments. Craig's request and an absence of specific directions from Davis suggest that Davis had only approved the experiments. On 27 May 1856 Craig wrote to Davis:

In previous reports I have mentioned, that the superiority in range and accuracy of fire of elongated balls, fired from grooved barrels, had induced investigations in relation both to the most advantageous shape of the ball, and the best mode of grooving the arm; that some experiments in regard to both these points had then been made, which it was intended to prosecute further;

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10. Rowland, II, 562-563.

kill as far as a man could see.

Davis first mentioned Ordnance Department research and development efforts in his 1854 annual report. In that report he made reference to "recent inventions in Europe" which "have produced changes in small arms," changes which<sup>8</sup> would necessitate improvements to American weapons. Davis went on to describe the superiority of rifled weapons and the methods used to take advantage of rifling in military weapons of other nations. Davis then stated his own involvement in the research effort: "My attention being drawn to the subject, I directed experiments to be made by the Ordnance department, both as to the proper shape of the ball and the best mode of grooving the barrel."<sup>9</sup>

In his 1855 report, Davis again discussed ongoing efforts to improve American weapons stating that smoothbore weapons were no longer being manufactured in the national armories, that new models of weapons had been adopted and would soon be in production, and that improved ammunition, cylindro-conical hollow based bullets, had been issued to troops armed with rifled weapons. It is significant that Davis did not mention the Model 1855 rifle musket, the most important of the new improved weapons. The only new model that Davis specifically mentioned was the pistol carbine, a

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8. Rowland, II, 410.

9. Rowland, II, 411.

commanding general. This article must have been particularly galling to Davis who had long quarrelled with Scott over their respective spheres of responsibility. Davis considered himself Scott's superior and a link in the chain of command between Scott as commanding general and Pierce as commander-in-chief. Scott viewed Davis as a bureaucrat who was no more than his equal. Indeed Scott thought the army regulations of 1841 and 1847 expressed adequately the relationship between the commanding general and the secretary:

The military establishment is placed under the orders of the Major-General Commanding-in-Chief, in all that regards its discipline and military control. Its fiscal arrangements properly belong to the administrative departments of the staff, and to the Treasury Department under the direction of the Secretary of War.

The General will watch over the economy of the service, in all that relates to the expenditure of money, supply of arms, ordnance, and ordnance-stores, clothing, equipments, camp-equipage, medical and hospital stores, barracks, quarters, transportation, fortifications, Military Academy, pay and subsistence, in short, every thing which enters into the expenses of the military establishment, whether personal or national. He will also see that the estimates for the military service are based upon proper data, and made for the objects contemplated by law, and necessary to the due support and useful employment of the army. In carrying into effect these important duties, he will call to his counsel and assistance the staff, and those officers proper in his opinion to be employed, in verifying and inspecting all the objects which may require attention. The rules and regulations established for the government of the army, and the laws relating to the military

establishment, are the guides for the Commanding General in the performance of his duties.[38]

These two paragraphs were the basis for much of the friction between Scott and Davis. Scott used the authority given him in these paragraphs to resist Davis's efforts to gain control of the War Department. That these paragraphs were omitted from the 1857 regulations suggests that Davis had gained at least one victory in his highly publicized, vituperative quarrel with Scott. But this victory seems to have been his main contribution to the revision of 1857. He certainly did not -- as his biographers have claimed --  
 39  
 revise and simplify army regulations.

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 38. General Regulations, 1841, pp. 84-85; General Regulations, 1847, pp. 8-9; U. S. War Department, Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1857, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857).

39. The regulations of 1857 were much more than a revision of the 1841 and 1847 editions. Besides an almost doubling of the pages devoted to the forms required to make reports to the general staff, the revision included numerous changes that effected the entire army. The changes ranged from the relatively simple elimination of two of the mandatory daily roll calls, reducing that number from five to three, to an increase in the practice rounds authorized per field battery a year, from 200 a year in 1847 to 500 a year in 1857. The single most radical departure from previous editions of army regulations was in an article entitled, "Troops in Campaign." This article contained at least eight of the articles in the 1847 edition and a great deal of original information. It now described, step by step, the operational responsibilities of a field commander. "Troops in Campaign" was more like a twentieth century description of a commander's responsibilities than a mid-nineteenth century hodgepodge of disparate regulations. General Regulations, 1847, pp. 15, 70; Regulations, 1857, pp. 9, 30, 63-107.

Although Davis contributed substantially less to the development of weapons than historians have often said, he did do more to relocate government arms manufactories than and as much to study the Crimean War as his most enthusiastic biographers have claimed. However, in relocating armories and arsenals he was once again far more a skilled southern politician than an impartial secretary.

In his 1853 annual report Davis suggested that one of the two national armories, located at Springfield, Massachusetts, and Harpers Ferry, Virginia, be closed in order to establish another somewhere in the West. The advantages of this action would be a "more equal and equitable distribution of these national establishments,"<sup>40</sup> and a "more convenient and economical" site.

Manufacturing the weapons closer to frontier posts where the majority of troops served would reduce transportation costs without increasing the costs of materials and labor. Thus, lower unit prices.

In spite of its apparent cost effectiveness, such a course of action gained little support in Congress. Representatives of the states in which national and private armories already existed were strongly opposed to relocating a national armory. Conversely, political support for relocation centered in those few western states with a chance of being

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40. Rowland, II, 330.

selected as the new site. And supporters of the established armories easily neutralized representatives of those states in the Northwest or South not likely to become the site of a new armory. In many respects a political situation analogous to that of the competition for the terminus of the Pacific railroad developed -- none of the potential sites would forego their own prospects of a financial windfall in support of a competitor.

Once his efforts to relocate a national armory had failed, Davis sought another way to favor the South or West with arms manufactories. Davis did not address the issue in his 1854 report, but he had not yet accepted defeat. In his 1855 report Davis requested appropriations for arsenals in Texas, New Mexico, and California.<sup>41</sup> Funds were included for western arsenals in the 1856 appropriations act;<sup>42</sup> and with the funds to expand facilities at Benicia, California, and purchase land in Texas, Davis felt confident enough of his success to announce a new concentration policy to Congress in his 1856 report. Ostensibly to reduce expenses in the Ordnance Department, selected arsenals of deposit were to be upgraded to arsenals of construction. Davis planned on assembling weapons at four of these arsenals -- Watervliet

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41. Rowland, II, 562.

42. Statutes at Large, 34:2, 149-150. Appropriations were approved on 30 August 1856.



in the Northeast, Fayetteville in the Southeast, Benicia in the Pacific Northwest, and an as yet undetermined arsenal on the Texas gulf.<sup>43</sup> These four arsenals would provide the "equal and equitable distribution"<sup>44</sup> desired by Davis.

Unable to secure the disestablishment of one of the national armories, Davis used his executive authority to achieve a similar, albeit less satisfactory, result.

Just as Davis was primarily responsible for relocating federal arms manufactories, so too was he responsible for sending a commission to observe the Crimean War. In 1855 Davis dispatched Alfred Mordecai, Richard Delafield, and George McClellan to Europe to determine the impact of recent technological advances on the military art. Davis's instructions to the commission specified a lengthy list of areas he deemed especially important, but because of the wide range of the topics listed, no single objective for the commission can be discerned from their instructions.<sup>45</sup>

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43. In the nineteenth century arsenals were classified according to function. An arsenal of deposit was a storehouse for excess weapons; but at an arsenal of construction, weapons were assembled and repaired using parts manufactured at a national armory, and machinery, patterns, and gauges were maintained to allow production of replacement parts.

44. Rowland, III, 83; Davis, Papers, V, 249. In 1853 Craig had advised against upgrading the Fayetteville Arsenal because it was not on a railroad line -- Fayetteville still lacked a railroad connection in 1856.

45. Rowland, II, 446-448.

The Crimea Commission was not the first commission to be sent to study European military establishments. In 1840 Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett had sent a commission to examine the foundries of Europe -- Mordecai was also a member of that commission. This 1840 commission investigated all facets of European foundry operations, gathered information on small arms developments, and purchased books and military equipment. As a result of this commission, the United States continued the use of bronze in the production of most of its cannon.<sup>46</sup> Peter V. Hagner had also gone to Europe in 1849 to examine recent developments in weapons technology.<sup>47</sup> And at the outset of his tenure in the War Department Davis had allowed several individuals to travel in Europe and report back on their observations to the War Department.<sup>48</sup>

One such individual, John B. Magruder, recommended in 1853 that an official commission, such as the later Crimea Commission, was needed to insure that the American military establishment kept up with its European counterparts. Davis referred Magruder's letter to Craig, and Craig responded<sup>49</sup> that a commission was "advisable, but not necessary."

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46. Falk, I, 257-258.

47. Ordnance Department Reports, II, 290-336.

48. Davis, Papers, V, 209, 293, 328-329.

49. Davis, Papers, V, 209.

Davis took Craig's advice at the time but later decided that a commission was necessary.

John Muldowney, in an unpublished doctoral dissertation on Davis's tenure as secretary of war, described the Crimea Commission as a grandiose plan that never came to fruition. While Davis was initially very interested, he failed to support the commission once it encountered difficulties in securing access to the French sector. According to Muldowney, Davis lacked the perseverance needed to overcome<sup>50</sup> difficulties which could develop in any project.

In this case Davis did not lack perseverance. Davis had sent the commission to the Crimea to obtain evidence of the need for mass production of improved weapons. Davis clearly hoped that the commission would return to the United States<sup>51</sup> by November 1855. If the commission had done so, he would have included their findings in the 1855 annual report. Davis had previously assigned Mordecai the task of revising the army regulations, suggesting that Davis thought the Crimea Commission would be a relatively short assignment. But when the commission was detained in Europe until mid-1856, Davis was unable to use its findings in the congressional battle for increased funding; and when that

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50. John Muldowney, The Administration of Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War, unpublished doctoral dissertation submitted in 1959 to Yale University, pp. 84-85.

51. Rowland, II, 448.

battle was lost, Davis's interest in the commission declined.

Although Davis was unable to use the commission's report to increase weapons production, he was able to learn from the war in the Crimea. The Crimea Commission may have failed to realize the strength of entrenched fieldworks defended rifled weapons, but Mordecai clearly appreciated the advantage of the muzzleloading rifle musket over even the best of breechloaders.<sup>52</sup> Davis strongly respected Mordecai's professional opinion and, therefore, refused to let money be diverted from the muzzleloading rifle muskets to breechloaders. As his biographers claimed, Davis understood the importance of monitoring international military developments.

But in general Davis was less effective, less creative, and more political in using his executive authority than his biographers have concluded. He did not play a major part in the development or adoption of the improved model 1855 weapons; nor was he able to persuade Congress to appropriate funds to mass produce the new weapons. As for the development of new tactics and revision of army regulations, Davis, at most, merely approved the completed texts. While he did show his political astuteness in relocating arms manufactories, his southern sympathies once again were

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52. Falk, II, 475-477.

clearly evident. In sending a commission to the Crimean War, Davis did exhibit his understanding of the importance of international military developments; but, by allowing a trusted observer to influence his attitude toward breechloaders, he delayed federal funding of the next important advance in military weapons.

## Chapter 4

### A Reappraisal

Jefferson Davis served as secretary of war from 7 March 1853 to 6 March 1857. During his administration there were many important changes in the army, changes attributed to him by biographers and other historians. Dodd, Strode, Winston, and others give Davis credit for increasing the pay and the strength of the army, for constructing a system of national fortifications, for improving harbors and rivers, for developing weapons, and for adopting new infantry tactics to offset the increased range and accuracy of weapons. In addition, Davis revised army regulations, experimented with camels in western service, improved the United States Military Academy, and perceived the importance of sending a commission to observe the Crimean War. Even when unsuccessful, Davis was working creatively to build a stronger army. Although he failed in securing either a retired list for officers or benefits for widows and orphans his efforts demonstrated his concern for a vigorous officer corps and a rank and file that would have stability and high morale. Similarly, his efforts at reorganizing the army, an

objective not to be achieved until the turn of the century, demonstrated his concern for the development of a more efficient, and hence more capable, military establishment. Only in Davis's insistence on a southern route for the proposed Pacific railroad, did he allow politics to come before the good of the country.

New evidence indicates Davis played a much more limited role as secretary of war than his biographers have claimed. In only three cases was he primarily responsible for changes. In 1853 he recruiting and reenlistment incentives proposed that resulted in an increase to enlisted military pay. These incentives differed considerably from proposals of other leaders of the army and reflected Davis's feelings on the best method of solving the army's desertion problem. Davis also initiated experiments with camels to determine their utility in western service -- a project that he had supported in the Senate, to the amusement of his colleagues, and that he had seen to fruition in the War Department. Finally, Davis deserves credit for the Crimea Commission. Although sending officers to Europe was certainly not an original idea with Davis, he adopted it during the Crimean War even though his chief of ordnance thought it unnecessary.

More typical of Davis's performance as secretary of war, he presided over or accepted changes in the army that were forced by circumstances or initiated by others. Davis

strongly supported an increase to the army. In both his 1853 and 1854 annual reports Davis devoted considerable attention to justifying an increase, but Congress voted an increase only after Indians had proved how vulnerable frontier settlements were. Davis had an even more passive role in the introduction of rifled weapons and new infantry tactics. For a decade before he became secretary of war, "soldier-technologists" in the Ordnance Department were investigating advanced features that would be incorporated into the 1855 weapons. A less supportive secretary might have delayed standardization of rifled weapons for a short time longer; but he could not have arrested the rapid development of weapons in the western world or their adoption in the United States. Nor was Davis responsible for initiating tactics to complement the new weapons of 1855. Davis's correspondence clearly indicates he knew little of what Hardee was doing to accelerate tactical evolutions. At most, Davis supported Hardee by introducing his tactics into the United States Military Academy.

If Davis was not such an innovative secretary as his biographers have claimed, he was certainly a more political secretary. As a graduate and vocal supporter of the United States Military Academy, Davis obviously favored further development of that institution. Nevertheless, he merely approved new construction and an extension of the academic term. He did appreciate that a five year course of study



would favor candidates from the southern and western sections of the country more than those from the eastern. While his biographers have allowed that Davis may have favored the South in his insistence on a southern route for the transcontinental railroad, they have strongly denied any other instances of sectional favoritism during his administration; and yet, his actions on the system of national fortifications and on the harbors and rivers improvements are also examples of passive, political administration of the War Department. To forestall sectional opposition to new fortifications in the South he did no more than endorse the recommendations of his chief engineer. To restrict improvements to rivers and harbors -- he refused to recommend additional federal appropriations.

The confusion over Davis's role resulted largely through misinterpretations of his annual reports. In his own assessment of the events in question Davis laid no claim to personal credit for the improvements. Instead of humility, Davis may have given a candid, straightforward answer when he commented on the "zeal and activity of the department during that period."

## Appendix A

### ANNUAL REPORT OUTLINES

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of Jefferson Davis's annual reports in his biographer's assessments of his actions as secretary of war. Virtually all of the examples used as evidence of his expertise in military affairs, his concern for the officers and men of the army, and his accomplishments for the good of the army and the nation can be found in these reports. Because the annual reports contained so much information they have been widely cited. Yet, in spite of this attention the basic outline of the reports has been largely ignored. Historians have gone to the reports looking for information on particular subjects and failed to see their continuity. A different approach to the study of Davis's annual reports would be to look for the structure which ties the disparate elements together.

A topical outline of Davis's annual reports might appear

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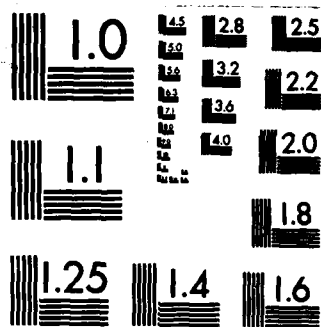
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

as shown at appendices A-1 through A-4.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the reports in this manner makes it possible to put the various topics in a broader perspective. The order in which the topics were addressed, the types of recommendations made, and the percentage of the report devoted to particular issues are all indicative of Davis's own perception of his role as secretary of war.

Structurally the four reports are very similar. Each report begins with those issues specifically related to the operations and requirements of the army, and then progresses through a discussion of the militia, the United States Military Academy, projects to improve the national defense, internal improvements, and administrative projects under War Department control. The location of specific issues varies from year to year, but generally speaking the relative position of the topics listed above remains the same.

As the secretary of war Davis had numerous responsibilities, each of which required his personal attention at different times; however, Davis's perception of the relative importance of those responsibilities may be indicated by the order in which he considered the topics in his annual reports. Furthermore, Davis's perception of his role within each of his assigned areas of responsibility can

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1. The complete reports can be found in Rowland, II, 292-333, 389-418, 552-571, III, 68-98.

be seen in the manner in which he covers the topics in his reports. In relation to the army, this would indicate that Davis saw his role not just as a policy planner and advisor to the president on administrative matters, but as the civilian head of the army subordinate only to the president. His comments and recommendations on relatively minor issues, besides exhibiting his familiarity with departmental issues, can also be seen as a method of extending his sphere of responsibility.

An indication of the relative importance of an issue to Davis is the amount of an annual report he dedicates to the issue. In 1853 the two longest topics of discussion were the Pacific railroad surveys and Davis's recruiting and reenlistment incentive package. In 1854 there was relatively little on the surveys; the longest topics were Davis's army reorganization plan and the recommendation for a strength increase. But in 1855 and 1856 the surveys were again the longest topic, with Indian conflicts and the necessity of concentrating forces the second longest in each year respectively. Not only was the discussion of the Pacific railroad surveys the longest, in one year it was double the length of the second topic and in another triple the length.

There are two possibilities for the inordinate amount of discussion on the Pacific railroad surveys: either it was, in Davis's opinion, the single most important issue of his

administration, or it was the issue on which he expected the most trouble from Congress. Davis's fixation on a Pacific railroad is especially significant in that while his administration has been characterized as entirely nationalistic in nature, one of the strongest cases for sectionalist tendencies can be built around his efforts to insure that the southern route for the railroad was selected.

In the following outlines the entries with numbers in parentheses beside them are specific issues addressed by Davis in the reports. The numbers are the percentage of the entire report devoted to that particular issue. For example, IV B 2 (Experiments with camels) shows (4.2), which means that 4.2 percent of the total report was devoted to a discussion of Davis's recommendation to Congress to appropriate funds for experiments with camels. While there is a certain degree of subjective evaluation in where the discussion of one issue ends and the next begins, the order in which the issues appear in the outline is the same as that in the actual report. The entries without numbers beside them are general subject areas which group like issues together in order to facilitate an understanding of the report's underlying framework. In other words all of the issues relating specifically to the army are discussed first, next are the issues relating to the militia, and so forth.

I. Regular army	
A. Authorized strength	(0.3)
B. Combat operations	
1. Indian conflicts	(6.1)
2. Appropriation shortfall for remounting light artillery batteries	(0.3)
C. Force deployment	
1. Troops	(3.5)
2. Supplies	(2.6)
D. Service requirements	
1. Recruiting and reenlistment incentives	(13.4)
2. Increase of forces	
-Line troops	(6.0)
-Engineer sappers	(0.3)
-Hospital stewards	(0.4)
-Storekeepers and barrackmasters	(0.1)
3. Increase of compensation	
-Widows and orphans relief	(0.2)
-Officer retired list	(0.5)
-Officer pay	(0.6)
-Merit certificates for noncommissioned officers	(0.7)
-Troop comfort in barracks	(0.1)
-Enlisted pay allowance for additional duty as laborers	(0.1)
-Disbursing officer pay allowance	(0.1)
II. Militia	
A. Apportionment of arms	(1.1)
B. Tactical instruction books	(0.6)
III. USMA-Five year term	(2.1)
IV. Appropriations to improve the national defense posture	
A. Approved appropriations	
1. Seacoast defences (fortifications)	(4.3)
2. Pacific railroad surveys	(22.6)
B. Recommended appropriations	
1. Experiments with camels	(4.2)
2. Port for Fort Yuma	(0.8)



## V. Internal improvements under War Department control

A. Harbors and rivers	(9.9)
B. Civil suits	(0.9)
C. Lakes surveys	(0.7)
D. Military roads	(0.8)

## VI. Response to a congressional resolution

A. Contract arms	(7.2)
B. National foundry	(0.9)
C. Western armory	(2.4)

## VII. Projects under administrative control of the War Department

A. Capitol extension	(3.5)
B. Aquaduct	(0.9)
C. Acquisition of fireproof War Department building	(0.6)

## VIII. Introduction and conclusion

(1.0)

(99.8)

I. Regular army	
A. Authorized strength	(0.6)
B. Force deployment (troops)	(2.6)
C. Combat operations (Indian conflicts)	(6.1)
D. Service requirements	
1. Increase of army	
-Based on dispersal of forces	(8.7)
-Based on past experience	(2.4)
2. Recruiting	(1.2)
3. Increase of appropriations	(1.7)
4. Experiments with camels	(0.8)
5. Increase of compensation	
-Officers pay	(3.0)
-Enlisted pay (ordnance troops)	(0.7)
-Widows and orphans relief	(0.5)
E. Reorganization of the army	
1. Rank and command	(8.6)
2. Staff	(21.6)
3. Line	(3.1)
4. Officer retired list	(4.2)
II. USMA	
A. Five year term adopted	(2.9)
B. Additional officer quarters required	(0.5)
III. Appropriations to improve the national defense posture	
A. Seacoast defences	(1.7)
B. Small arms improvements	(6.6)
C. Revised tactics	(0.8)
IV. Militia	
A. Apportionment of arms	(0.2)
B. Tactical instruction books	(0.2)
V. Recommended changes to congressional policy	
A. Sale of useless military sites	(2.1)
B. Modification of two audit system	(1.8)
C. Disbursing officer allowance	(0.9)
D. Commendation to Treasury Department for assistance to army disbursing officers	(0.9)

**VI. Internal improvements under War Department control**

A. Civil suits	(0.7)
B. Harbors and rivers	(3.0)
C. Lakes surveys	(0.3)
D. Military roads	(1.8)
E. Pacific railroad surveys	(2.9)

**VII. Projects under administrative control of the War Department**

A. Capitol extension	(1.8)
B. Aquaduct	(0.8)
C. Acquisition of fireproof War Department building	(3.2)

**VIII. Introduction and conclusion** (0.8)

(100.0)

I. Regular army	
A. Authorized strength	(0.5)
1. Recruiting	(1.1)
2. Negative impact of discharges of minors	(2.0)
B. Force deployment (troops)	(4.4)
C. Combat operations	
1. Indian conflicts	(9.3)
2. Increased appropriations necessary	(0.6)
3. Negative impact of arrearage policy	(0.9)
D. Reorganization of army	(3.7)
E. Service requirements	
1. Increase of compensation	
-Officer retired list	(2.9)
-Officer pay	(2.6)
-Enlisted pay (ordnance troops)	(0.7)
2. Increase of army (support troops)	
-Medical corps	(0.9)
-Military storekeepers	(1.6)
F. Recommended changes to congressional policy	
1. Sale and/or purchase of military sites	(4.9)
2. Closure of a military asylum	(4.8)
3. Widows and orphans relief	(0.5)
4. Modification of two audit system	(1.1)
G. Report on the experiments with camels	(1.7)
II. USMA-Academy should be removed from Corps of Engineer supervision	(3.3)
III. Appropriations to improve the national defense posture	
A. Seacoast defences	
1. Fortifications	(0.8)
2. Armaments	(0.2)
B. Recommended appropriations	
1. Fortifications for Ship Island, Miss. and Columbia River	(1.9)
2. Western Armory	(0.7)
3. National Foundry	(0.6)
C. Report on small arms improvements	(3.5)
IV. Militia	
A. Apportionment of arms	(1.6)
B. Conversion of state-owned flintlock weapons to percussion system	(0.7)
C. Tactical instruction books	(0.4)
D. District of Columbia armory	(1.7)

## V. Internal improvements under War Department control

A. Military roads	(1.0)
B. Harbors and rivers	(3.9)
C. Lakes surveys	(1.0)
E. Pacific railroad surveys	(28.1)

## VII. Projects under administrative control of the War Department

A. Capitol extension	(2.6)
B. Capitol dome	(1.7)
C. Aquaduct	(1.4)

## VIII. Introduction and conclusion (0.7)

(100.0)

I. Regular army	
A. Authorized strength	(0.7)
B. Force deployment (troops)	(1.7)
C. Combat operations	
1. Indian conflicts	(9.3)
2. Necessity of concentrating forces	(13.9)
D. Service requirements	
1. Increase of compensation	
-Officer pay	(1.7)
-Widows and orphans relief	(0.5)
-Officer retired list	(0.5)
2. Reorganization of army (rank/command)	(3.9)
F. Recommended changes to congressional policy	
1. Negative impact of arrearage policy	(1.0)
2. Modification of two audit system	(0.8)
G. Report on modified artillery organization	(0.8)
II. Report on Ordnance Department operations	
A. Required increase in appropriation for armament of fortifications	(1.7)
B. Use of wrought iron for carriages	(0.6)
C. Mounting guns of large caliber	(0.7)
D. Organization of light batteries	(0.8)
E. Gun metal experiments-recommendation for a national foundry	(1.8)
F. Small arms improvements	(5.4)
III. Militia	
A. Tactical instruction books	(0.2)
B. Conversion of state-owned flintlock weapons to percussion system	(1.2)
C. District of Columbia armory	(0.3)
IV. Appropriations to improve the national defense posture	
A. Western arsenals	(2.6)
B. Seacoast defences (fortifications)	(3.4)
C. Crimea Commission	(3.9)
V. USMA-Academy should be removed from Corps of Engineer supervision	(2.2)

VI. Internal improvements under War Department control	
A. Military roads	(4.0)
B. Harbors and rivers	(2.3)
C. Lakes surveys	(0.8)
E. Pacific railroad surveys	(15.1)
F. Report on experiments with camels	(4.8)
VII. Projects under administrative control of the War Department	
A. Capitol extension	(3.6)
B. Capitol dome	(1.3)
C. Post Office extension	(0.5)
C. Aquaduct	(1.4)
VIII. Militia-Request for legislation to improve efficiency	(3.7)
IX. Kansas/Nebraska conflict	(2.5)
X. Introduction and conclusion	(0.4)
	(100.0)

reports. In relation to the army, this would indicate that Davis saw his role not just as a policy planner and advisor to the president on administrative matters, but as the civilian head of the army subordinate only to the president. His comments and recommendations on relatively minor issues, besides exhibiting his familiarity with departmental issues, can also be seen as a method of extending his sphere of responsibility.

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